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FRONTISPIECE.

Beautiful Bertha.

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CHAPTER I.

HONEY-POT BROOK.

"THERE is Honey-pot!" exclaimed Mr. Perrit, with boyish glee.

Mr. Perrit and his daughters, Esther and Louisa, had left the railroad, over which they had traveled more than two hundred miles, and were driving in a one-horse wagon to the village of Sylvania.

The sun was just sinking in the west as they came in sight of Honey-pot brook.

"Brook! Do you call this a brook?" exclaimed Louisa. "Why, a brook is just a narrow stream that I could jump over."

"Later in the season you will be able to jump over this brook. It is now swollen by the snow and rain. Many a time, when I was a boy, have I followed its winding course, and waded three or four miles in its waters."

"But what a queer name it has," remarked Esther.

"I always liked its name," replied Mr. Perrit; "and the brook seemed perfectly contented with it, too, dancing over the smooth pebbles, and winding its shining way through groves and green meadows, and bounding over huge rocks, as merrily as any brook in the whole world."

"It is *awfully* wide and deep now; how are we to get over?" anxiously demanded Louisa.

"By going right through, to be sure; come, old horse, jog along." So saying, Mr. Perrit snapped the whip, and the horse splashed in up to his knees, and then stood still to take a draught of cool water.

"Oh dear, dear, this is a deep river, I know it is; you have forgotten the road, papa, and the brook, too," said Louisa, with tears rushing over her cheeks.

"Not remember Honey-pot brook! I have forgotten many things, change has come over many more, but this brook is as familiar to me as the face of your mother. Those very willows, now so rough and gnarled, were then in

their glorious prime, drooping gracefully over the brook. Just beyond that rock yonder there is a deep pool, where it was glorious fun to bathe and swim."

"The willows already show that spring has come," said Esther.

"Yes ; they are the last to put off their greenness in the autumn, and the first to put it on in the spring."

"Green ! Why, papa, they are a bright yellow, and look like giant street-brooms," replied Esther.

"Do let us get out of this deep water," entreated Louisa.

"Well, come, old horse, you have had a very good draught, we will go on," said her father ; and soon they were on the other side of the brook.

"What a feathery look the dark trees have—what is that owing to, papa?" asked Esther.

"The buds are starting. A month earlier these trees were of a dull uniform color ; now they are a soft, rich brown, contrasting beautifully with the clear March sky."

"And there are as many shades of brown as

we could find in Muller's worsted-shop," said Louisa, who, now they were safely over the brook, had found her spirits as well as her tongue.

"But who ever saw worsted of so pure and heavenly a blue as this country sky? Look up, papa, the trees overhead form a brown net-work contrasting charmingly with the sky," said her sister.

Esther had always lived in the crowded street of a large city, and had only seen the smoky sky over the tops of tall houses.

"Oh! do see that flock of white geese, following their leader in solemn procession, Indian file. Did you ever see anything so funny and so absurd?" asked Louisa.

"Yes, indeed, my child; it seems like the very same flock, thirty years ago, that marched home every evening. I hope you will love the country now as I did then. But here we are at the old homestead." As Mr. Perrit said this, he turned the horse's head towards an old pear tree, in front of a large log-house, almost covered with ivy.

"Surely, papa, this was not your birth-place; it is a log-house," said Louisa.

Mr. Perrit, without replying, sprang out of the wagon, and then, as he lifted the young girls out, they noticed that tears were filling his eyes. Beloved parents had gone to the grave since he had visited the place of his birth. So grief and joy were mingled like rain and sunshine.

In front of the house was a court-yard filled with shrubbery. In the midst of it was a woman, whose face was hidden by a large sun-bonnet, and who was so vigorously pruning an old lilac bush that she had not noticed their approach. Suddenly she turned, came forward, and leaning over the gate, with her pruning-knife in hand, surveyed the travelers with a bewildered air, muttering to herself, "Why, they've brought a carpet-bag!"

Mr. Perrit fastened the horse, and then advanced to the gate; smiling through his tears, he held out his hand, saying, "Don't you know me, Nancy?"

"There's but one man in the world who has a right to call me Nancy, and that is Paul Perrit; but you can't be he."

"Why not? I used to be Paul Perrit, and

you used to be my sister Nancy. These are your two nieces. Are you going to close your gate upon us?"

"Why, they've brought a carpet-bag!" again muttered Miss Nancy, gazing at the girls with a look of amazement, while she slowly opened the gate.

"We have taken you by surprise," said Mr. Perrit, kindly.

Miss Nancy walked backward till she came to the large stone step before the door, and there she sat down, threw aside her pruning-knife, and resting her elbows on her knees, covered her face with both hands.

Mr. Perrit advanced towards her, but the girls stood at the gate; Louisa giggling uncivilly, so that she had to cram her handkerchief in her mouth, while Esther, who had the carpet-bag in her hand, timidly whispered, "Why has she taken such a dislike to our carpet-bag?"

"I am sorry, sister, that we did not write to you, to tell you we were coming. After so long an absence, it was cruel for me to take you so completely by surprise."

"It's your own voice, Paul, and I am glad

to hear it once more," said Miss Nancy, rising and opening the door. "Come in."

Mr. Perrit beckoned to the girls, and they advanced, but Esther left the offensive carpet-bag outside the gate.

CHAPTER II.

MISS NANCY.

THE interior of the log-house was much more neat and comfortable than might have been expected from its rough exterior. It was two stories high. The small windows of all the front rooms were hung with white dimity curtains, and deep fringe of Miss Nancy's handiwork. Worsted work, of which the staring cats and monstrous roses were not copied from German patterns, covered the heavy mahogany chairs; patchwork of silk and chintz proved the industry, if not the taste, of Miss Nancy Perrit.

Soon after the unexpected arrival of the travelers, a small tea-table, supported by four slender legs, was spread with a damask cloth of Miss Nancy's spinning, which had not been unfolded for many years.

Esther and Louisa watched with great interest while an old woman-servant placed on the table cold ham, biscuit, honey, *preserves*, *pickles*, cream, and hot corn bread. The long ride and the country air had given them keen appetites; and though Louisa stared at the strange mingling of sweet and sour, the good things rapidly disappeared from the table.

After taking several cups of tea, Mr. Perrit said, "Sister Nancy, I am going on a business excursion to the far West; I shall take my wife with me, and I wish to leave my girls with you."

"With me! Paul, you must be crazy. You know I never liked children," exclaimed Miss Nancy, shaking her curls. Yes, curls—gray curls adorned Miss Nancy's head. She never wore caps, and her hair, about two fingers' long, curled all over her head.

"They have been at school all their lives, I may say, for they cannot remember the time when they did not go to school. Esther is about thirteen, and Louisa eleven years old; they have never before been in the country, and a long vacation will be of service to their health, both of body and mind."

"Poor things! I dare say it would; but I am not the person to take care of children, especially the city-born and city-bred," said Miss Nancy, somewhat contemptuously.

"They will not need much care; let them run and romp as much as they please. I want them to love the country just as we did, sister, when we were young."

Somewhat softened, Miss Nancy replied, "But they can't romp all the while. How should I keep them busy?"

"They have brought plenty of work and books for rainy days; and when they are disposed to be industrious, they will assist you."

"What, clothing, books, and work, all in that one carpet-bag! It frightened me, because I thought somebody had come to take up their quarters with me for the night."

Louisa laughed outright, and Esther said, "I believe the unfortunate bag has not yet been brought in."

"So you consent to let the poor girls, who know nothing of the country, stay with you for a few months?" continued Mr. Perrit.

"If they won't pick my flowers, nor scare

my chickens, nor tease my cats, nor bring any other children to my house."

"We certainly will not gather your flowers without your consent," said Esther.

"Then you will not gather them at all. My flowers bud, bloom, wither, and die, like their mistress, in the spot where they were born."

"And the chickens, when they are dear little wee-wee things, may we not just take them in our hands?" asked Louisa, coaxingly.

"Not for the world!" replied Miss Nancy with a look of horror, and a fluttering such as the hen-mother would make at a hawk ready to pounce on her brood. She added, "That is just what I should have expected from a city girl."

"Oh, excuse us. We will learn good country ways in time, if you will be so kind as to teach us," said Esther, soothingly.

"Well, well, I must consult Orpy. It is a pity that you should be cooped up in the stifling air of the city all your lives, and never know how to do one useful thing."

"I hope you will teach them many useful

things, and that they will be a great comfort to you," said Mr. Perrit.

"Since you insist on it; but really I am afraid *that one* will be as idle and as saucy as my parrot;" and Miss Nancy pointed at Louisa.

'Hold your tongue! hold your tongue!' screamed the parrot, as if to give a specimen of his sauciness.

"Naughty Poll!" said Miss Nancy, shaking her curly head at him.

The parrot, not in the least abashed, hopped to her shoulder, and pretending to kiss her, said, "Pretty Miss Nancy! pretty Miss Nancy!"

No wonder the girls were tempted to laugh, for Miss Nancy was anything but pretty. She was a tidy, active little body, busy as the bees that hummed all day long about the honeysuckles of the front porch. The gray curls about her face and neck contrasted oddly with her wrinkled face. Her dress of brown merino fitted closely to her spare figure, making her look as straight and thin as one of her own bean poles. The green parrot was not her only pet. White rabbits might be seen hopping about among the grass and shrubs. Nine black cats

were daily fed with a bountiful meal from the kitchen. A flock of tame pigeons alighted to gather up the crumbs after them. Canary birds were the in-door favorites, and the parrot scolded or flattered them all, in-doors and out, from morning till night.

When tea was over, the bright wood fire blazing and crackling in the wide fire-place, looked very inviting; but the girls were tired and sleepy, and asked permission to go to bed.

While Miss Nancy went to make some needful preparations, Esther and Louisa stealthily brought in the carpet-bag, giggling together about Miss Nancy.

“You must excuse your aunt’s peculiarities,” said their father; “she has lived alone for the last eighteen years, and in all that time she probably has not had a guest to sleep in her house.”

And yet the house was as neat and clean as a new pin, from garret to cellar, for twice a year the regular house-cleaning was performed, and after that the spare rooms were aired and dusted every week. Miss Nancy loved neatness for its own sake.

Long after Esther and Louisa were asleep, Mr. Perrit and his sister remained by the fire-side, talking over the days of their childhood and youth, and forming plans for the future.

CHAPTER III.

TREASURES DISCOVERED.

THE next morning, Esther and Louisa were awakened at an early hour by cackling and gobbling, and crowing and lowing, and a variety of noises perfectly amazing and incomprehensible to their city-bred ears.

“Why, what *is* the matter?” exclaimed Louisa, jumping out of bed and peeping through the white dimity curtains.

Nothing was to be seen there but the quiet front yard, where the crocuses were dotting the grass, and the roses and lilacs showing their leaf-buds. Opposite the window was a high hill, which seemed to touch a rosy sky, while a few light clouds of a golden hue were floating above.

“Oh, jump up quick, Etta dear,” exclaimed Louisa; “the sky in the country is pink, and

it actually comes down to a great hill in front of the house."

Esther was soon by the side of her sister. "That must be the east," said she, "and we are now seeing what we never saw before in all our lives—a sunrise."

"So it is, so it is!" exclaimed Louisa, clapping her hands, "for it begins to be so bright I can hardly look at it."

"How beautiful!" whispered Esther, whose delight was mingled with religious reverence. "I do not wonder that heathens, who knew nothing of the great God, who is a Spirit, worshiped the sun."

A smart tap at the door startled them, followed by Miss Nancy's voice. "Time to be up, children; country folks are early risers."

"We are up already, and will soon be down stairs," said Esther.

When they entered the parlor they saw the breakfast-table spread for three.

"Where is papa?" asked Esther, as Miss Nancy seated herself at table, and motioned them to take their places.

"Gone, long ago."

"Gone!" exclaimed both at once; "gone where?"

"Gone home to your mother in the city. He found he must leave before dawn, in order to reach the first railroad train. He would not disturb you just to say good-bye. Here is a little note he left for you."

Tears were now streaming over faces which a moment before were bright with joy.

"Come, don't cry. Here are your bowls of bread and milk, and fresh butter just churned, and green water cresses from the brook."

They tried to eat, poor things, but could scarcely choke down the wholesome food.

"Don't take on so, for pity's sake; I can't stand it," said Miss Nancy. "What is the use of crying?"

"Pretty Miss Nancy! Don't scold," said the parrot.

"Hold your tongue, sauce-box," retorted Miss Nancy.

"Hold your tongue! hold your tongue!" clamored the parrot, a dozen times repeated.

Louisa laughed in spite of her tears; and Esther, as soon as the parrot gave her a chance,

asked that she might be excused, and went with Louisa to their room to read their father's note.

The note was as follows :

"I am sorry to leave you, my darlings, without a parting kiss, but I would not disturb your sweet slumbers. Since we must be parted for a while, let us all bear it as cheerfully as possible. Be very kind and gentle to each other and to your aunt, and *try to exert a good influence over her*. She is now your sole guardian ; be obedient and respectful to her. Remember your loving parents in your daily prayers. God bless you, my dear children, and keep you under His special care. May He restore you, improved in health and character, to the arms of your devoted father."

And now they gave free vent to the tears they had tried to suppress before Miss Nancy.

They were aroused by the sound of wheels, and thinking their father might have returned, flew to the window. No ; it was their own luggage, which had been brought from the depôt.

Box after box was taken off by two strong men, and placed in the court-yard, while Miss Nancy stood at the door, talking to herself.

“One, two, three, four, five boxes, and two trunks big enough for chicken coops. Paul has played a nice trick on me ; he means his children shall stay with me for ever.”

“What can be in all those boxes?” thought the sisters, as they clattered down stairs and stood beside Miss Nancy at the door.

“Why, in the name of common sense, have you brought all this stuff with you?” demanded Miss Nancy.

“We don’t know,” was the only answer they could give.

The men who brought the luggage began to open the mysterious boxes. Number one contained a nice mahogany wardrobe for the girls’ bedroom ; number two, a secretary and book-case for the same purpose ; number three was filled with books ; number four contained a handsome mantel-clock for Miss Nancy ; number five, a China tea sett, and a silver milk jug and sugar bowl which had belonged to her mother. Miss Nancy was in ecstasies. That same silver had been the wonder of her childhood and the admiration of her youth, and all the gold of California would have been a trifle

to her compared with that ancient milk jug and sugar bowl.

“I always said I ought to have these things of my mother’s, being the only girl of the family. It has been a bone of contention between us for years, and now Paul at last has done just right;” and Miss Nancy hugged the treasures to her heart.

It was sufficient occupation for the morning for the girls to arrange their wardrobe and book-case. They laughed long and loud over the clothing which they placed in their wardrobe. The coarse frocks, stout shoes and stockings, and woolen sacks, were well fitted for the racing and romping their father had spoken of. The large sun-bonnets, which would have been stared at contemptuously by their city school-mates, were tried on amid perfect shouts of merriment. Then came the pleasant task of arranging their book-case and secretary. Many old favorites among the books were greeted cordially, and many new ones placed by their side with great exultation. There were valuable works on botany, conchology, and other branches of natural history, with colored plates.

“And here is a beautiful book about birds,” said Esther, “and exactly such a blue-bird in it as we saw in the pear tree this morning. Now we shall be able to know the names of all the flowers and birds in the country. How kind it was for dear papa and mamma to think of so many things for our pleasure.”

The “pigeon-holes” and the little drawers of the secretary delighted Louisa. The note paper, letter paper, foolscap, envelopes, &c., were arranged and reàrranged in them, and were each and all pronounced lovely. The morning passed so rapidly, they could hardly believe their ears when summoned by Miss Nancy to dinner. They ran down stairs.

“Dinner !” exclaimed Louisa ; “ why it seems but two or three hours since breakfast.”

Miss Nancy pointed to the new clock on the mantel. It was twelve o’clock.

“Do you dine at this early hour?” asked Louisa.

“To be sure I do ; it is the hour intended by nature for dinner ; just in the middle of the day. I consider it a sin to dine at any other hour.”

“We must, then, have been great sinners all our lives,” replied Louisa, laughing.

“I know you haven’t been brought up right, but I shall try to teach you true, natural ways. Everything in city life is turned upside down and hind-side foremost.”

“Sauce-box!” screamed the parrot, “hold your tongue.”

In the afternoon the weather was delightful; the sun shone with summer warmth. Having dressed themselves in their new coarse garments, Esther and Louisa went out for a ramble.

Miss Nancy advised them to go to the top of the hill in front of the house, which would give them a view of the country for miles and miles around. They scrambled over fences at the risk of breaking their necks, and laughed at their own awkwardness. They stumbled over stones, and caught their dresses in briar-bushes, and at last arrived at the top of the hill completely out of breath, and seated themselves on a flat rock.

Distant mountains seemed to enclose them all around; rivers and valleys, towns, villages, and scattered farm-houses were spread over the

wide landscape; among forests of trees, and hanging above all, like a boundless dome, was the clear blue sky of March

So new and wonderful was the scene that the sisters for some minutes remained in silent admiration; then Louisa exclaimed, "What an immense world!"

"And how great and good must our heavenly Father be, who made it so beautiful for us to enjoy," responded the elder sister

"Don't it look like a big map! I am sure I shall like geography better than ever now," said Louisa.

After admiring the landscape awhile longer, they wandered about the hill, collecting mosses in their checked aprons, till the sun was setting, and beautiful clouds of purple and gold floated in the western sky.

Suddenly a wind sprung up, and before they reached the foot of the hill, it blew a gale. Much ado had they to keep their sun-bonnets on their heads, and at the same time hold fast to the treasures in their aprons. Miss Nancy was at the door, when they reached the gate, puffing and blowing like porpoises.

"Come in quick. March is no fool," said Miss Nancy, with a contortion of features approaching to a laugh. Miss Nancy had almost forgotten how to laugh.

"What does that mean?" asked Esther, as soon as she could get breath.

"It means," replied Miss Nancy, shutting the door with great difficulty, "that March is just now playing us one of his lion tricks. He is pleasant and mild as a lamb at times, and then we believe spring has come in earnest; and then again he shows his white teeth, and roars and raves like a ramping lion. But this is his parting salutation, for to-morrow is the first of April."

"You are quite poetical, Miss Nancy. See what a variety of beautiful mosses we have found on the hill. And here is a most curious plant, all white; it looked as it grew like a Chinese umbrella. Oh, dear, the precious thing was so delicate that it is broken." So saying, Esther held out the pieces.

"Gracious me! It is nothing in the world but a dirty toadstool. What city ignorance!"

"A toadstool! Is that its name? It was not

dirty when I gathered it," replied Esther; "it looked sweetly."

"So it did, and I thought it was the funniest flower that ever grew," said Louisa, coming to her sister's aid.

"Flower! It is poisonous to eat, and an ugly thing. And that moss of which you have brought home such lots, is that a treasure, too?"

"Certainly it is. We shall find it described in our books. We called this trumpet moss, because it has tiny trumpets all over it; and this extinguisher moss. Don't you see those little caps like extinguishers? The moss covered the rocks like a beautiful soft carpet. It must be of some use, for God made it."

"You are queer children," Miss Nancy said. "You must not carry this trash to your room; I will show you where to put it in the wood-house."

They did as they were bidden, but looked rather crest-fallen to find their precious collection so utterly despised. Their appetites, however, did not suffer in consequence. No food was ever relished better than that supper. This pleased Miss Nancy.

"I told your father it would be so," she said. "In a few months, instead of two thin, sallow, *mincing* city girls, I shall see two nice, plump, rosy-cheeked country girls, fit for a cattle-show."

"That is too funny. What if we should be fit for nothing else?" asked Louisa.

"By that time you will begin to be good for something, for I am going to teach you to make bread, pies, cake, soap, pickles, preserves, and lots of other things."

"If we succeed as well in making nice things as we do in eating them, you will be satisfied with us, I am sure," said Esther.

According to the usage of Miss Nancy, they went to bed at an early hour.

Though tired and sleepy, they did not forget their absent parents in their prayers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GROTTO.

THE next morning at the table, Miss Nancy said, "You haven't seen my poultry-yard."

"No; but we have heard the creatures; they will not let us sleep after there is a ray of light," replied Louisa.

"Certainly not; instinct teaches them when it is time to wake. They follow nature, and I follow them. The sun never gets ahead of me in the morning."

In the poultry-yard were slovenly bantams and dandy top-knots—hens speckled and black, yellow and white; but, alas for Miss Nancy, it was before the time for Shanghais and Chittagongs. Ducks, with glassy-green backs, white breasts, and red bills, paddled about in a small pond, which in the city would have been called

a mud-puddle. The white geese were departing for their daily journey to the brook. The scarlet-throated turkeys commenced such a horrible gobbling that Louisa was fairly frightened out of the poultry-yard.

"What can you do with all this poultry?" inquired Louisa.

"Use what we want, and send the rest to market. I like to see things grow and thrive. Has not your father told you that his sister Nancy was a thrifty woman?"

"Never; he said you were a good scholar when he went to school with you."

"Did he indeed! I have learned very little from books since. Now I never read anything but the Farmer's Almanac. When I was young I read too many novels, and became romantic."

"Romantic! I should never have suspected that."

Miss Nancy shook her gray curls very gravely as she replied, "Household learning is better for girls than book learning. We live in a very common-place world."

"That depends very much on our way of seeing it," said Esther. "To me it seems a

glorious, beautiful world." My dear mother calls it 'the vestibule to heaven.'"

By this time the frightened Louisa ventured back, and peeping in at the gate, said, "Miss Nancy, will you show us the way to Honey-pot brook?"

"Take the long path through my garden; at the end of it you will find a gate opening into a large field. Go directly across the field, and you will find yourself by the side of the brook; but take care you do not fall in, for the bank on this side is rocky and steep."

And so to their surprise they found it, while the opposite bank was low and fringed with alders, which had just "hung out their tassels." A gentle slope, covered with trees, extended for some distance from the brook. They sat down on one of the rocks and deliberated how they were to descend through the rough pathway.

"I dislike the name of this brook; suppose we call it the Susquehannah," said Louisa.

"The Susquehannah is a wide, wide river, and so near us too," objected Esther.

"Well, then, the Juniata, that is a beautiful name—the blue Juniata."

"There is the same objection to that; they are both too near. Suppose we call it the Delaware? There are so many historical associations connected with that name."

"Historical associations," repeated Louisa with a puzzled look; "you do use such big words."

"You have read in your History of the United States about Washington's crossing the Delaware, in the revolutionary war."

"Oh, yes; it was frozen over—I remember now; and Philadelphia is on the Delaware, and Trenton, too. There, I know something about geography, you see. Is Delaware an Indian name?"

"No; the river and State were named after Lord Delaware."

"I like it for that. I admire of all things lords and ladies. But let us try to climb down these rocks, and come nearer to the Delaware."

They scrambled down the rocks until they came, at some distance from the place where they started, to the side of the brook, where it was strewn with scattered, broken rocks. These

rocks were thrown together in a variety of forms.

“Oh, here is a grotto—a real grotto, just such as I have read about in story-books!” exclaimed Esther.

Four large rocks formed this grotto; three of them made the sides of an irregular enclosure, and a fourth lay over the others, serving very well for a roof. The room or grotto thus formed was large enough for the girls to stand in without stooping, and though irregular in shape, contained several square yards of floor or pavement, which was covered with loose stones. It was open in front towards the brook, and from it a smooth green bank sloped down to the water's edge.

“The first thing we do must be to clear away the loose stones,” said Esther; “then we will cover the pavement with moss, and ornament it with pebbles and shells; then it will be a real fairy grotto.”

“Beautiful! beautiful!” exclaimed Louisa, clapping her hands with delight; “and we will be fairies, at least play we are. I will be Lady Delaware.

"That would not do for a fairy's name," said her wiser sister. "You know fairies were supposed to live in flowers, and every fairy might take the name of her favorite flower. I choose the violet for my flower, and I will be the fairy Violetta."

"I like the rose best; besides, that is the queen of flowers. I will be queen of the fairies."

"Yes; Queen Rosamia, if you like."

"Queen Rosamia! Oh, that is charming!"

"But there is work to be done," said Esther, as she tried to move a large stone, too heavy for her to lift.

Louisa attempted to assist her, but their united efforts were not sufficient to remove it from the grotto; so, after tugging away for a while, they gave it up.

"Well, we can cover this with moss and use it for a seat, and all the rest of the stones we can take outside and lay up for a wall or enclosure round the front of our grotto."

"Esther, you are the smartest girl I ever knew; you ought to be queen of the fairies. Let me see; what are our names?"

“Violetta and Rosamia.”

“Wouldn’t it be too funny if some good fairy should take pity on us, and come and fit up our grotto?” said Louisa, as she seated herself near the opening, quite tired with tugging at the large stone.

“No, indeed; I think the fun is in doing it ourselves,” replied her sister, bringing out an apronful of smaller stones, and commencing the enclosure or court-yard of the grotto. “I think Queen Rosamia must condescend to help poor Violetta.”

They were still working busily, carrying out the stones, when they heard Miss Nancy at a distance yelling with all her might, “Esther-r-r! Louisa-a-a!”

They shook the dust from their aprons, and ran and clambered up the rocks at the risk of their necks, frightened at the thought of having stayed beyond the *natural* dinner-hour. However, they got only a slight scolding.

After dinner, Miss Nancy said, “I am going to take you to my kitchen, and teach you to make apple-pies.”

Esther and Louisa would have preferred going

again to the fairy grotto ; but no, Rosamia and Violetta must condescend to make apple-pies.

First they must pare the apples. This they did much after the fashion of him who “pared his wits on both sides, and left nothing in the middle ;” at least, after their awkward attempts, very little was left of the apples but the cores.

Louisa cut a deep gash in her thumb while paring the third apple ; and while Miss Nancy was binding it up, the parrot provokingly said,

“No matter—no matter ; try again.”

Old Orpy, Miss Nancy’s only servant, was deaf as a post, and the parrot had caught a great many words from hearing them screamed into the poor woman’s ears. It quite surprised the children that the parrot’s sayings should so often be appropriate ; but they did not notice the thousand words that were not so ; and as the creature talked a great deal, it was not strange that she sometimes hit right.

“You can’t have any more apples this time, child, but you can grate a nutmeg, as it is your left thumb that you have so clumsily cut. Fie ! Esther,” continued Miss Nancy, “you are wasting my apples shockingly.”

"Am I, indeed! How can I help it?" meekly inquired Esther, who was most vigorously slashing away at them with a large knife.

"You must pare them thin—thin as a wafer. Apples are as scarce as gold-dust at this time of year, and almost as costly, especially these choice rusty-coats."

Esther tried in vain to make the paring as thin as a wafer. In attempting it she left bits of brown skin scattered over them, at which Louisa laughed, and said, "Sister, your apples are *pied* already."

"Have you not grated that nutmeg yet?" asked Miss Nancy, who did not understand Louisa's pun.

"No; but I have grated the skin off my fingers," said Louisa, with a rueful face.

"I declare, I could not have believed it possible that city girls of your age could have been so awkward in the kitchen. What on earth are you good for?"

"Miss Nancy, do you know how to play the piano?" roguishly asked Louisa.

"No, indeed."

“But why don’t you know how?” demanded Louisa.

“Because I never learned, and never wished to learn to play the piano.”

“A very good reason, Miss Nancy. Now suppose we should give the same for not knowing how to make apple-pies?” retorted Louisa, giggling triumphantly.

“Sister, sister!” said Esther, reprovingly, “I am sure it is very kind in Miss Nancy to try to teach two such awkward things as we are, and I am much obliged to her, for I wish to learn how to do useful things.”

“There is some hope of you, Esther, though you have cruelly wasted my apples. Now, you see, here is the paste for four apple-pies, but you have wasted the fruit, so that I shall have but two.”

“Well, I will go without,” said Esther.

“And so will I,” said Louisa, “and that will make it just right—one for you, and one for Orpy.”

“No, no! I will make two custard pies, with thick crust, to use the paste.”

“Ah! now you are very kind, Miss Nancy

for I like custard a great deal better than apple pie. You said when we came that you did not love children; but I do believe you mean to love us, by and by," said Louisa, looking roguishly in Miss Nancy's grave face, and patting her on the shoulder.

A pleasant smile stole over her rigid features, but she said, "Go away, saucy child."

CHAPTER V.

THE FAIRIES.

MISS NANCY required of her visitors great neatness and order in their room, and to attend to it themselves. So the next morning the queen of the fairies was obliged to assist the more humble Violetta in sweeping and dusting. The task was done not without some most unfairylike grumbling from Rosamia. Then they started, carrying baskets on their arms, in which moss and pebbles were to be carried to the grotto. When they got there, behold it was already fitted up in a marvelous manner! The loose stones had been all removed, and laid on the circular wall for the court-yard. The floor within the grotto was covered with bright green moss, as soft as velvet. This beautiful carpet was ornamented with a design formed

of white pebbles. A circle of large pebbles, glistening like pearls, had the names Violetta and Rosamia in the centre, formed of small pebbles.

Esther and Louisa stood at the entrance in delighted astonishment.

"How beautiful ! how beautiful !" exclaimed Esther ; "who has done this ?"

"The fairies !" whispered Louisa, with almost breathless awe.

"Fairies !—human fairies like ourselves," said her wiser sister ; "but I wonder how they knew our fairy names."

"A very mysterious thing ! How could they know them, for we were all alone ?"

Just then Esther observed a small roll of paper near the entrance, and opening it, read aloud,

"The name of the brook is Castalia."

"Our fairy writes a bold hand," said Esther, showing the scroll to her sister. "We will call the brook Castalia."

Louisa peeped timidly into the grotto. Instead of the large stone, a neat green bench had been placed at one end for a seat.

“How strange!” she exclaimed, with her eyes staring wildly, while Esther stepped carefully over the moss carpet and sat down.

Louisa heard the sound of voices, and quickly turned her head. Then she beckoned to her sister, whispering, “I never saw any creature so beautiful in all my life. Can that be our fairy?”

At a short distance, seated on a rock, was the object of Louisa’s wild admiration,—a young girl whose beauty was indeed wonderful. She had taken off her bonnet for the purpose of arranging the rich chestnut curls which the wind had discomposed. A waiting-maid stood beside her, holding a pink bonnet ornamented with white feathers. On perceiving Louisa she shook back the luxurious ringlets from a face which might well have been mistaken for that of a fairy: the delicate rosy hue of the cheeks melted into the purest white, and the dark blue eyes seemed mischievously hiding themselves beneath soft dark lashes, while the parted lips were as red as the berries of a honeysuckle.

“Is *it* our fairy?” whispered Louisa, with a half-way belief that *it* was nothing human. “Speak to it Esther.”

The beauty, after gazing a moment at the strangers, snatched the bonnet from her maid, placed it on her head, and pointing at Esther and Louisa with a contemptuous expression, said something in a language which they did not understand, and then walked rapidly away.

“Who can she be?” exclaimed Esther. “She is very beautiful; but her expression was not pleasing.”

“I believe it is the fairy who has ornamented our grotto, and that she was not pleased because we did not thank her for it,” said Louisa.

“Nonsense! there are no such beings as fairies, and never have been; it is only a poetical fancy,” replied Esther.

Louisa shook her head, and seating herself on a large stone by the grotto, said, “I don’t know what to believe about it, but I feel a kind of creeping and shuddering that is very queer.”

Esther again went within the grotto, and soon returned, and saying, “See! this is no fairy weapon,” showed a pearl-handled pen-knife, which was marked on a small silver plate, W. M.”

“Where did you find it?”

“Among the soft moss in the grotto. W. M! Whose can it be? Let us ask Miss Nancy if she knows any one with these initials.”

“Oh, no! for then we shall be obliged to tell her all about our grotto, you know, Esther, and she might forbid our coming here.”

“I intend, of course, to tell her all about it, and shall try to restore the knife to the owner.”

When they reached Ivy Cottage, as they called the log-house, they found Miss Nancy in the garden.

“Do you know any person whose name begins with W. M.?” asked Louisa, almost out of breath with eagerness.

“That is a very strange question,” replied Miss Nancy, reddening with anger and embarrassment. “Never ask me questions about people.”

Thus checked, Esther, who was about to show the penknife, slipped it into her pocket, and walked off with Louisa to the house.

At night, after they had retired to their room, they consulted what they should do with the knife, and decided to place it the next day just where they found it.

“One thing has struck me as very remarkable here,” said Esther, as she took up her small Bible to read before going to rest.

“There are a great many remarkable things here,” replied her sister; “which one do you mean?”

“It is a very serious matter. Miss Nancy never has family prayers.”

“Family prayers! Who would she have to join her but cats, canaries, and deaf Orpy, with the parrot to say Amen?”

“Don’t treat the matter so lightly, Louisa; you know how sweet it was to unite with dear papa and mamma in family worship.”

“I know I often went to sleep at night during prayers.”

“And I hope you are sorry for it now. It does seem so heathenish and unthankful not to acknowledge our heavenly Father’s goodness from day to day, and to ask together forgiveness for those faults and sins of which we have been guilty, especially towards each other. It is mournful to think that any person of Miss Nancy’s age should live without reading the blessed Bible and praying to God.”

"Perhaps she reads and prays in secret," suggested Louisa.

"Let us hope she does. She takes good care to provide for our bodily comfort; but our dear mamma never forgot that we had souls as well as bodies, and that we are accountable to God for all that we are and all that we have. I intend to ask Miss Nancy if she would like to have us come to family prayers."

"Now, Esther, you talk like a Methodist preacher. I wouldn't ask Miss Nancy that question for a silver dollar."

"Do you not remember what papa said in his farewell note about *influence*? We are expected to exert a good influence on Miss Nancy, and we must consider how it is to be done."

"Well, do as you like; I should as soon think of asking her to give me that hideous parrot, with its everlasting 'Pretty Poll,' 'Never mind,' 'Try again.' I declare I am so angry with it, I could twist off its neck."

"Dear Louisa, that is a cruel, wicked thought. I am afraid you are angry with Miss Nancy because she would not answer your question. She may have good reasons for it. Don't go to

sleep so out of temper. Let us forgive as we hope to be forgiven, before we kneel down to say the Lord's Prayer. It would be a fearful thing to repeat those sacred words with anger burning in our hearts."

Louisa pouted for a moment; then she threw her arms around her sister's neck, and said, "I am a naughty child; I wish I was better."

Esther kissed her affectionately, and said in a sweet, low voice, "Ask, and ye shall receive. Jesus Christ was tempted even as we are, and yet without sin, that we may never despair of forgiveness when we ask it in His name. Good night!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE BEAUTY AND THE BROOK.

“Such a rainy day! nothing but pour, pour, pour,” exclaimed Louisa the next morning after breakfast, as she stood with her forehead pressed against the window-pane, while the rain fell in torrents.

“A nice April shower!” said Miss Nancy, who was washing up the breakfast things.

“But it is very provoking when we want so much to take a walk,” replied Louisa, pettishly.

“We must not forget who it is that sends the rain to water the earth and make the flowers we love to bud and blossom.”

Miss Nancy stared at Esther as she made this remark, and Louisa made no reply.

The grass in the court-yard looked fresh and green, the hyacinths and daffodils were already

in blossom, and the lilac buds had expanded wonderfully since the day before ; a horse-chestnut tree near the window was putting out its first tender green leaves from the varnished buds, where they had been sealed up all winter ; and a blue-bird was singing in spite of the rain.

Soon the drops of water were not all on the outside of the window. Tears streamed from the eyes of the affectionate but impulsive Louisa as she thought, "God is good and kind to make all these beautiful things. I wish I was like Esther, who never forgets what is right. I am sorry one minute, and the very next, almost, I do the same thing again."

"Come, Louisa," said Esther, affectionately taking her arm and leading her up stairs, "I have something to read to you." Then going to the secretary, Esther took out a book which looked like an album, but it was not, and said, "Shall I read my journal to you?"

"Yes, indeed. I haven't begun mine yet."

"Perhaps it would have been better if I had not, for I am afraid it is very silly. This is the motto,

“Let love and truth indite
Whatever here I write.”

“Poetry, to be sure !” exclaimed Louisa.
“Who ever dreamed of your writing poetry?”

“It is a sort of rhyming jingle ; don’t call it poetry,” replied Esther, coloring rosy red.

“The reign of old Winter, was past,
And Spring was rejoicing at last
That delicate flowers were peeping
From cold beds where they had been sleeping,
And birds were so merrily singing,
Where lately the tempests were ringing.
Alas, in our home there was sorrow,
For dear ones must part on the morrow ;
Our parents are summoned away,
And must not their parting delay.
Oh, God of the land and the sea,
I gladly entrust them to thee !
On, on with the speed of the wind,
We left the proud city behind,
And glided by river and vale,
By town and by mountain and dale,
The car-whistle shrieking a wail,
That went through my heart’s very core—
Ah, what if we see them no more !

“At length we left the cars, and glad was I
Another mode of traveling to try ;
A cosy ride we had, papa and Lou,
With me between, (the seat was made for two.)
Through leafless woods we jogged a mile or so,
And then we came to that sweet brook you know,

Whose name, from Honey-pot to Delaware,
Was changed one day, by damsel bright and fair ;
The brook, with yellow willows by its side,
Spread out its shining ripples deep and wide,
And Lou, who thought a brook was but a ditch,
Alarmed, cried out, " We all shall in it pitch !"

" Now you know I didn't use that ugly word," interrupted Louisa.

Esther went on—

" But yet we safely passed the *mighty* stream,
Which our papa a bosom friend would deem—
A friend whose every crook and turn he knew,
Unchanged, while he from youth to manhood grew.
The quiet woods of feath'ry brown we past,
And reached the ancient house of logs so vast ;
We wondered where such giant forests grew—
Tall shrubs (behold Miss Nancy peeping through !)
The budding lilac, tall seringle, too,
And roses soon to please with varied hue.
Miss Nancy stares like one who walks in sleep,
Then dear papa makes one tremendous leap ;
Then places Lou and me upon the ground,
And hastens to his sister with a bound
Of heart—that noble heart, so warm and good.
Amazed, Miss Nancy stark and silent stood."

" There now, that is enough for one day, and too much for your patience, Lou. Is it not ridiculous ?"

" No, indeed," replied Louisa, warmly. " It is sweet. I wonder how you can write poetry.

I could not make a single rhyme even if some one would tell me who fixed up our grotto, to pay for it."

"Don't call this stuff poetry. Only think how beautifully Lucretia Maria Davidson wrote before she was as old as I am."

"Oh, good, good!" exclaimed Louisa, clapping her hands, "there comes the blessed sun; we shall have a sweet afternoon. What a fool I was to cry about an April shower!"

After dinner the sisters started for the grotto. On approaching it, they saw the beautiful being who had excited such warm admiration the day previous, standing within the enclosure of stones, looking eagerly at the inside of the grotto. Her maid was seated on a rail fence near by, knitting.

"Is this yours?" said Esther, stepping quickly to the side of the young beauty and handing her the knife.

She snatched it without replying, and ran off, laughing so loud that the rocks around seemed to ring with the shrill sound. Soon she stopped, and seating herself on a large stone, began to sing.

"I do believe, after all, it is a fairy. I never heard any human voice sound like that," said Louisa, whose imagination was much excited.

Soon the stranger started up, and walked off, followed by her German maid.

"Let us see where she goes," said Louisa.

They wandered along by the side of the brook until they came to a beautiful little waterfall. The lively stream dashed over high rocks, and then rushed on, foaming and whirling among the stones. Across the brook, just above this pretty cascade, was a light foot-bridge. Esther was fond of drawing. She stood looking up, and wishing for pencil and paper to take a sketch of the charming scene, when splash came a stone into the brook, then another, spattering the water over the astonished sisters. They heard that peculiar ringing laugh, and looking up, saw the beauty peeping over the railing of the bridge.

"Could she have done it on purpose?" exclaimed Esther.

"The spiteful thing, of course she did!" retorted Louisa.

And they hastened homeward, full speed.

Miss Nancy was waiting tea for them. She looked uncommonly sad, and did not notice their spattered dresses. After they had been seated awhile at table, she said to herself, "I think she must have been poisoned."

They did not venture to ask a question.

"Yes, yes, it must have been poison."

"Poison!" exclaimed Louisa.

"Yes; my poor parrot is dead—dead! I found her lying on her back in her cage, her claws held up, and her mouth wide open—dead!"

"Death takes away the most precious things. I am very sorry for your loss," said Esther, kindly.

Louisa held her napkin to her mouth, and pretended to cough, to hide a laugh.

Was it possible that Louisa had anything to do with the death of the parrot?

As soon as they were together in their room, Esther said, "How could you laugh, Louisa, when poor Miss Nancy was so grieved at the death of poor Polly?"

"She looked so funny, and so did you; indeed, I couldn't help laughing; besides, I was glad the ugly thing was dead."

"Do you know how she came to die?"

"For want of breath, I suppose."

"Had you given her anything that could poison her?"

"Nothing, unless it was the piece of my shoulder she snapped off the other day."

"My dear sister, you hated the poor parrot, and wished her dead. You may pass too easily to hating human beings, and wishing them dead, too. The next step would be—murder."

"Murder! Oh, you are severe on me. I do not know any more than you do what killed the creature."

"I do not wish to be severe, my own darling sister, but we are just about to ask the protection of our heavenly Father and the forgiveness of our sins, and we ought to have a kindly, loving spirit. We should remember that God is love, and that not a sparrow falls to the ground without his knowledge. It seems to me dreadful to hate anything He has created."

"I am always wrong, and you are always right," said Louisa, throwing her arms about her sister's neck, and sobbing aloud.

"No, no, darling, I am often wrong, too.

May God forgive us both," said her sister, kissing her again and again. -

Poor Louisa! her sorrow for the time was keen. Her feelings were all quick, but not lasting. Her penitence, though bright as the rainbow after a storm, was as transient, too. There was a strong probability that the same fault she had bitterly repented of, one day would be committed again, whenever a similar temptation occurred.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WRONG PEW.

SUNDAY morning dawned bright and clear. Oh, how beautiful! The birds sang their sweetest and tenderest notes. What business had the cocks to crow so merrily? The cattle lowed; the geese, ducks, and turkeys joined in the concert.

"Why, they don't keep Sundays here," were Louisa's first thoughts on awaking.

There was more truth in it than she suspected. Miss Nancy was already with her congregation in the poultry-yard.

"Where do you go to church, Miss Nancy," asked Esther at the breakfast table.

"Nowhere," was the brief reply.

There was silence for a minute, then Esther said, "But you will allow us to go."

“Yes, if you can walk two miles to the village with old Orpy, who goes to church, though she can’t hear a word. It is as good a place for her to rest in as any other.”

Esther *might* have said it was a better place than any other, because she there would have sympathy in her devotions; and from habit and long association the place had become sacred to her.

“Don’t put on any of your city finery,” said Miss Nancy.

“We didn’t bring anything fit to wear to church,” said Louisa.

“Yes, we did, quite good enough,” replied Esther.

In simple but neat attire the sisters walked arm-in-arm to church, that delightful spring morning, preceded by Orpy.

A queer looking person was old Orpy. Bent almost double by age and hard labor, she hobbled away, leaning on a stout stick. Her gown of plaid linsey-woolsey had been her only go-to-meeting dress for a dozen years or more, and her little black satin bonnet had been its constant companion. A spotted calico shawl com-

pleted her attire. Though her nose was hooked and approached her chin, and her face was wrinkled and puckered, its expression was not disagreeable.

They had enjoyed the walk for a mile, when Orpy stopped, and pointing with her stick to the spire of the church, said, "It is a great privilege to take two sweet little ladies to the house of God.

" 'I have been there, and still would go ;
'Tis like a little heaven below.' "

"Dear old woman !" said Esther, "why have we never taken any notice of her before ? I do believe she is good. What an awful thing it would be if this poor old person were not religious."

Again Orpy spoke: "This is as pretty a morning as I ever saw of an April. I've *hearn tell* of *dimons*. Sure the dew glistens on the grass brighter than any *dimon-stone*. I hope your young hearts are thankful to God for making such a nice pretty world for you to live in ; but, my little dears, heaven is a brighter world than this. You know about its golden streets and gates of pearl."

Esther's eyes filled with tears, and her heart bounded with fervent joy and gratitude. Louisa was awed and silent.

As they approached the church, the people from all directions, on foot, on horseback, and in wagons, were gathering to the place of worship. Just as the sisters reached the door, it occurred to them where they were to sit, and they stood a moment hesitating; but Orpy led the way to the gallery stairs, which were inside the church, and taking her seat on one of the lower steps, motioned them to sit higher and near to the balustrade, that room might be left for others to pass up stairs.

The services commenced, and Esther joined with true and earnest devotion. Louisa was peeping through the balusters at *the beauty*, who sat in a pew near the pulpit with a gaily dressed lady and a young lad. Poor Louisa's pride had to suffer. After a while the strangers discovered her in her exalted position, and their eyes were often directed towards her and her sister. The beauty whispered to her mother, and then hid her face, laughing behind her book.

When the service was over, Orpy did not rise to go. The sisters, not knowing what to do, stood still while the people passed down the gallery stairs; then Orpy beckoned them to be seated, and taking a small basket from under her calico shawl, she spread a clean napkin on Esther's lap, and placed on it shaved tongue, biscuit, and cakes, saying, "I always bring dinner, so that I can stay all day." -

"How provoking!" exclaimed Louisa, "I have been mortified enough already."

Just then the clergyman came in at the side door, and walking to the gallery stairs, first shook hands kindly with Orpy, and then said, "I perceive, young ladies, you are going to remain for the afternoon service. You will find a more comfortable seat in the pew yonder." He pointed to the yellow-cushioned pew where the beauty had been seated, and continued, "The family rarely come in the afternoon. I beg you will not hesitate to sit there."

"Thank you, sir," said Esther.

He left them with a polite bow.

"Exactly like good Mr. Nelton," said Orpy. "He always takes kind notice of poor me. You

had better sit there. I knew what he meant by his motions. I often know more than folks think I do. Now, when you have done your dinner, go and stroll about and take the air."

Near the church was the graveyard—not a nicely-kept and ornamented "God's acre," as the Germans call it, but a "neglected spot,"

"Where the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

"Yet e'en these bones from insult to protect,
Some frail memorial, erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh ;

"Their name, their years, spelt by the unletter'd muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply,
And many a holy text around she strews,
To teach the rustic moralist to die."

The young girls wandered about with solemn awe. Fragile anemones waved their graceful heads as the gentle breeze swept over the green graves. Violets, white and blue, and the sweet-briar, just putting forth its tender leaves, perfumed the air. Though man had neglected to adorn the sacred spot, God had not forgotten it.

"May we gather these flowers?" said Louise to the sexton.

"As many as you please, Miss."

When the girls seated themselves in the yellow-cushioned pew to which the clergyman had directed them, Louisa held in her hand a large bouquet of wild flowers. As the service was about to commence, who should enter the church but the beauty and her brother. She opened the pew door, and motioning to the surprised sisters to come out, whispered, "This is *our* pew."

The tall boy, who was behind her, gave her a smart push, which sent her into the pew in haste. Esther and Louisa rose to let her pass to the end of the seat, but the boy shook his head and bowed for them to be seated.

The beauty was anything but lovely now. She pouted her pretty lips, and turned up her pretty nose, and tossed back contemptuously her pretty head. She whispered to her brother, "They've brought a bushel of weeds into our nice pew."

Louisa looked at her valued bouquet, and wondered if her saucy neighbor called those sweet flowers "weeds." She was ready to cry with vexation.

The disdainful beauty drew away her silk

dress as far as possible from Louisa's mousseline de laine, and cast sneering glances at the coarse shoes which had been soiled that morning by a walk of two miles. Esther, who sat at the end of the seat, did not observe all this, but joined with her usual interest in the services.

When they were over, the beauty said aloud to her brother, "I wonder what business these country gawks have in our pew, scattering nasty weeds and mud all over it."

Poor Louisa had dropped a few of her short-stemmed violets on the carpet. "Mr. Nelton told us to sit here, Miss," said she, pettishly. I am sorry if we have soiled the *old* carpet or hurt the yellow cushions."

The beauty, quite astonished, walked out, while her brother held the pew door open for them all to pass.

"Thank you, sir," said Esther, as she passed out.

"You are welcome to sit here whenever you come to church," said he, with a very polite bow.

They now joined Orpy, who was waiting for them at the church door.

When they had walked a short distance, "W. M. ! the very owner of the pearl-handled penknife !" exclaimed Louisa.

She was interrupted by Orpy : " Pretty creature ! very pretty creature ! but hasn't she anything in the world to do but just to be pretty, like a posey or a bird ? I am speaking of the proud little Miss who was in the pew with you. Her silly mother is spoiling her for this world and for another. Why, she spends her whole time in taking pains with that girl to make and to keep her handsome. She bottles up May-dew and snow-water to wash her with. She wastes the milk of two cows every day for her to bathe in. She thinks roses grow and blossom on purpose to scent the linen of her darling. Does the proud woman ever think who made her child, and that He will one day ask what she has done for her soul ? I am afraid not."

The sisters listened with astonishment. Louisa asked her the name of the beauty in so loud a voice as to frighten her sister ; and Orpy, though she did not hear, seemed to understand what she wanted to know, for she continued,

"You had better say nothing to Miss Nancy about Bertha Maxwell; it is a sore subject. You must know, Mrs. Maxwell, when she was young, was called a beauty. She was poor and proud. Our Miss Nancy was going to be married to Mr. Maxwell, but that woman stepped in, and by her arts drew him off. Miss Nancy has never been like the same person since. Woeful day was it to poor Maxwell when he married that woman! Miserable life he led! She married, and teased him to death with her extravagance and *uppishness*. Poor man! he has been in his grave several years."

"There, I told you W. M. must be the beauty's brother. He was very polite to us; but, O, that Bertha Maxwell! I am so angry with her, I could bite her," exclaimed Louisa, setting her teeth firmly together.

"The day is too holy and beautiful for anger," replied her sister, mildly. "See those purple, gold-tipped clouds piled up in the west, looking like illuminated palaces and frowning castles, while those tiny floating clouds are fire-birds hovering over the magnificent scene. I wonder if poor old Orpy is not reminded of the

heavenly city of which she spoke this morning."

"I can't think of anything but that insulting Bertha Maxwell, turning up her nose at my sweet flowers, and calling them nasty weeds!"

"My dear sister, how unlike your spirit is to the one described by the clergyman in his sermon this afternoon."

"I didn't hear a word of the sermon."

"You heard the text, surely—'He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth.' Then he preached from it about a forgiving spirit, and the virtue of meekness."

"I tell you, Esther, it might as well have been Greek for me; that silly girl was all the while provoking me. She poked out her small foot to show it in its silk stocking and purple kid shoe. Then she would draw off her long kid glove, and spread out her hand to exhibit her taper fingers and the rings on them. I was vexed because she was so beautiful and so proud."

"The good clergyman said we should overcome evil with good. Now, if you had listened

to the sermon and taken no notice of her, it would have been far better for you both."

They were now silent. The quiet and peaceful spirit of the gentle Esther had been disturbed awhile by the anger of her sister; but soon a sweet calm stole over her mind; she enjoyed the lovely evening, and lifted up her grateful heart to the Almighty Creator.

When they were about a quarter of a mile from Ivy Cottage, Orpy exclaimed, "Goodness me! there comes Miss Nancy. She has not been as far as this from home in more than eighteen years. What can be the matter? I shouldn't wonder if our house was burnt down!"

Sure enough, there was Miss Nancy, wearing an antiquated silk dress, and a bonnet the fashion of which had passed away before Esther and Louisa were born. Esther hastened to meet her aunt, who greeted her with a smile. The loving girl threw her arms around Miss Nancy's neck, and kissed her cheek.

Miss Nancy was surprised by this token of affection. Turning round and walking beside Esther, she said, "The day has been long and

lonely. I have missed my poor parrot. She used to keep up a noise, and seemed to me almost like a human being."

Esther slid her hand gently within her aunt's arm, and pressing it slightly, said, "And did you not miss us too? I missed you, and most earnestly longed to have you with us at church."

"I suspect Orpy has been very talkative. She is apt to be when she gets a chance," replied Miss Nancy, willing to turn off the conversation. "Poor old soul, she is getting childish."

"She seems to be a good Christian woman—is she?" asked Esther, earnestly.

"After her fashion, she is; somewhat superstitious, according to my notion; yet she is faithful to her duty."

Louisa was still in bad humor.

"What ails you, child?" asked Miss Nancy.

"I wish I had stayed home from church with you."

"Why so?"

"Because, in the first place, I didn't like my seat on the gallery stairs with a servant; and I

did not like my seat in Mrs. Maxwell's pew much better."

"In Mrs. Maxwell's pew!" exclaimed Miss Nancy.

"Yes; the clergyman told us to sit there; but that proud beauty would have turned us out if her brother had not prevented it."

Esther looked reprovingly at her sister, and she was silent. Not another word was spoken till they reached home; but Esther felt Miss Nancy's arm tremble, and saw that tears were in her eyes.

The nice cold chicken and ham on the tea-table showed that Miss Nancy had not been unmindful of her nieces' comfort. Their light dinner and long walk rendered the wholesome meal quite relishing.

After they had retired to their room, Louisa said, "I have a question that I want to ask you, Esther, but I am ashamed to ask it; I know you will think me silly."

"What is it? Don't be afraid."

"Will you answer me candidly?"

"If I can."

"Well, then, am I handsome?"

"I never thought much about it. You look very well to me."

"Did you ever hear anybody call me *pretty*?"

"Never, that I remember."

Louisa sighed, but questioned no farther. She looked in the glass and saw a pair of bright dark eyes, dark hair to match, a nose that turned a *very little* the wrong way—that is, upward, a smooth but dark complexion, and a pair of full red lips that were given to pouting. Surely she was not ugly. Her sister's eyes were blue, and her complexion fair. Was Esther beautiful? Louisa was in doubt.

CHAPTER VIII.

STYLE IN A SHANDRYDAN.

“It is quite time for us to have letters from papa and mamma,” said Esther, the next morning at the breakfast-table. “How shall we get them?”

“You can go to the post-office in the village; you have learned the way. The post-office is near the church,” replied Miss Nancy.

Quite delighted, the girls started on their walk to the village.

How glorious was that spring morning! The velvet grass dotted with flowers; the tender leaves of the trees, just beginning to flutter in the stirring air; the yellow butterflies, like winged flowers hovering over the fields;—all were sources of pleasure to the sisters.

As they reached the small post-office they

saw a queer, old-fashioned vehicle standing in front of it.

“What is that?” exclaimed Louisa; “chariot, phæton, gig, or *shandrydan*, as papa would say?”

“*Shandrydan* I think it must be,” replied Esther, much amused.

It was a four-wheeled carriage, the body of it a dingy yellow, the wheels red, the top, which was thrown back, a faded green. Originally it was designed for a pair of horses; now it was drawn by a single gray mule. In the carriage were seated Mrs. Maxwell and her daughter. The *coachman* had gone into the office. Coachman! He was a mulatto boy, perhaps twelve years old, dressed in blue-striped linen, and yet a livery servant—that is, his shiny black hat was ornamented with a gilt band and large brass buckle. With these insignia of office,

“His feet, perchance, may lack a shoe,
Yet he’s a coachman through and through.”

Grand and stately sat Mrs. Maxwell and Bertha in their carriage, as Esther and Louisa stood at the door of the post-office.

"Mamma, *them's* the same country josies *what set* in our pew yesterday," said Bertha.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the mother, motioning to the sisters to come nearer the carriage.

Esther stepped forward, but Louisa stood still, indulging in a little private giggle.

"Girl! what business have you and that other girl to sit in genteel people's pews at church?" demanded the lady, throwing back her head proudly.

"The Rev. Mr. Nelton requested us to sit there," replied Esther, in a remarkably lady-like manner, and a voice whose sweetness was equally remarkable.

Mrs. Maxwell was puzzled. "Are you the children my daughter has several times seen by Honey-pot brook?"

"The very same," cried Louisa. "She dashed mud and water over us when we stood by the brook. She isn't very polite, if she does ride in a carriage."

At that moment the mulatto boy came out of the office, and saying, "No letters, marm," jumped on the box, snapped his long whip at the mule, and drove off.

“Style! style!” exclaimed Louisa, looking after them, while Esther went into the office; “style with a vengeance!” and then the laugh which had been suppressed burst forth—a completely girlish He! he! he!

This laugh was suddenly checked by the approach of two young lads, who smiled as they cast a glance at her, and walked leisurely onward. One of them was the supposed brother of Bertha Maxwell.

“Oh, but he couldn’t know what I was laughing at,” thought Louisa, quite troubled when she remembered his politeness to them at church.

Esther now came out with two letters, one for each. All other things were forgotten. So they walked along reading these precious epistles from their beloved parents.

“My letter is full of good advice,” said Louisa, “which, I am sorry to say, I am not likely to follow, unless I am better than I have been. You do not need as much advice, Esther; perhaps yours contains more news.”

“You may read it,” said Esther, her eyes brimming with tears. The last lines from her

mother had touched her tenderly. They were as follows :

“I know, my dear child, that you are governed by Christian principles, and that wherever you are your presence will be like a sunbeam. I desire humbly to thank God that He has through His grace rendered you an unspeakable blessing to your father and myself.”

“You are a good girl, there is no doubt of it, Esther, and I love you dearly,” said Louisa; “and yet, do you know, I sometimes wish you were not half as good as you are, because I should seem better if we were more alike.”

“I am afraid you all think me much better than I am,” replied Esther, with unaffected humility

“Suppose we go home by the way of *Castalia*,” suggested Louisa.

Esther cheerfully assented, and they followed the course of the brook.

When they reached the grotto, they found a beautiful fresh bouquet of green-house flowers lying on the rustic bench within. Around the bouquet was a slip of paper, on which was written the following rough stanza. Esther and

her sister stood at the entrance of the grotto as they read it, Louisa holding the bouquet:

“Farewell to the grotto, farewell to the brook,
The haunt of the fairies, so beautiful ;
Farewell, Violetta, with one parting look
To Rosamia, good and dutiful.”

Damon and Pythias.

Esther read the lines aloud, and at the close heard a sneering laugh. Raising her eyes, she saw Bertha Maxwell standing near, *making up* a contemptuous face.

“Suddenly the beauty came forward and snatched at the flowers, exclaiming in an angry tone, “They are *ours* ; I know they *came* from our house, and I will have them.”

Louisa tried to lift the bouquet beyond her reach. Bertha snatched at it again, saying, “Dandelions are good enough for country josies.”

The passionate Louisa, exasperated by this second desperate attack, made a vigorous defence of her rights. She drew the nails of her left hand not *very lightly* over the beauty's face, leaving three long scratches on the beauty's rosy cheek.

Esther seized hold of Louisa's arm while the German maid took Bertha by the shoulder and drew her off, yelling most piteously, "She scratches like a wild-cat!"

"You might better have let her have the bouquet than to fight for it," said Esther.

"No indeed; I shall not yield my rights to her."

"Calm yourself, dear Louisa; you have gained the victory, certainly."

"And carried off the prize. The pretty flowers are not injured, though the pretty face is," retorted Louisa, triumphantly.

"Perhaps for life. That would be most unfortunate."

"I don't think so. It might do her good. But, Esther dear, *somebody* thinks *we* are beautiful, though you do not. Look at that poetry again."

"I think you mistake; it is the brook that is called beautiful."

"No, no; the haunt of 'the fairies so beautiful'—that is, *I and you*."

"I think it means the brook; there is a comma after fairies."

"But you will confess that you are called 'good and dutiful.

"That was only to make out the rhyme. You don't know, as you never try to make rhymes, how we adopt any word that rhymes when we are puzzled. There are very few words that rhyme with beautiful. Besides, you know this is a mere compliment, not meant for truth."

Louisa shook her head doubtfully, wishing to believe that she was called "beautiful."

As they reached Ivy Cottage they heard the sound of galloping on the road, and running through the house to the front gate, were just in time to see the *liveried* coachman spring off the gray mule. Puffing and stammering, he handed a note to Louisa, saying, "Misses sends this *ere* billet to the old woman what lives here."

Louisa took the note, directed to "Nancy Perrit."

"Do you wait for an answer?"

"Yes, I s'pose I does."

Louisa and her sister found Miss Nancy, and handed her the note.

“What does this mean?” she inquired, after she had twice perused it. “Read it Esther.”

THE NOTE.

“Two saucy girls, who, I hear, live with you as servants, have *brewtally* attacked my beautiful Bertha, and *inflicked* a severe wound on her face, from which she may never recover. If these girls are bound out to you, I shall *sew* you for damages. Think of the lovely *creach-ure* coming home with the blood streaming over her face, where the *lilly* and the rose are *blenned* in such *marvellious* beauty! Oh, the cruel deed! You or they shall pay for it.

“FLORINDA MAXWELL.”

Louisa was frightened, and yet she laughed convulsively.

Esther looked very grave, and said, “Dear Aunt Nancy, this is a long story. Shall we let the messenger go home, and send an answer when we have had time to think about it?”

“Yes, by all means let him go.”

And the messenger on his gallant gray galloped home.

"Louisa, did you actually scratch Bertha Maxwell?"

"Aunt Nancy, I actually did; and I am not a bit sorry for it, either."

"Stay, Louisa; let me tell the whole story, beginning at the beginning," said Esther.

They sat down in the little parlor. Miss Nancy took up her knitting, and listened quietly while Esther related everything that had happened to them in connection with the Maxwells, and ended by expressing extreme regret at what had just happened.

It was doubtful what Miss Nancy would say or do. She remained silent for at least ten minutes, and then said, "Esther, go and bring pen, ink, and paper here."

She did so.

"Now write as I dictate, in a fair round hand, plain as print, these words:

"Nancy Perrit informs Florinda Maxwell that the two girls whom she takes for servants are the daughters of Paul Perrit, Esq., and she may 'sew' him for any damage done to the face of *the beauty*."

"But, Aunt Nancy, would it not be well for

us to say we are sorry for the injury?" gently urged Esther.

"You may say what you please; I have said my say."

"Louisa dear, allow me to express some regret on your part."

"I can't say I am sorry when I am not. I only defended myself."

"The flowers, you mean."

"Well, my property, then."

Esther added to the note: "Esther Perrit regrets exceedingly that Miss Bertha Maxwell should have received a wound on her very pretty face, and hopes the consequences will not be lasting."

The question now was, who should carry the note. It was at last settled that old Orpy, who now and then hobbled on week days to the village, should, after dinner, be the bearer. Miss Nancy was amused at the astonishment of the poor deaf woman when she told her that she was to carry the note to the "big white house."

"What is to come of all this!" exclaimed Orpy, who could not conjecture what it was all about.

The sisters then read the kind messages in their letters from their parents to Miss Nancy, who seemed in unusually good spirits.

While Orpy was absent they planted flower seeds with their aunt in the garden, and then assisted her to get tea. Louisa was in high spirits, and quite delighted Miss Nancy with lively little songs and funny stories.

Esther waited with some anxiety for the return of the infirm messenger, regretting among other things that this affair had been the cause of trouble to her.

She came just at sunset, laughing aloud as she entered the house.

"What is the matter?" they would all have asked, but Orpy saved them the trouble.

"Marm Maxwell sent for me to come in. By the motion of her mouth and the shaking of her fist, I suppose she talked very loud. I was not the wiser for it, but I did not tell her I was hard of hearing. Then she pointed to her daughter and the three long scratches on her face, and shook her first at me again. I wasn't a bit frightened. Then the gal, she began, and she talked and talked, and grew red in the

face as a piny, stamped her small foot at me, and set a little dog to bark at me. Just then a nice young lad came in, who appeared to be all ready for a journey, but seeing me he stopped. Then he went to the sideboard and got out some *very* poor cake (that wasn't his fault) and a glass of wine, and handed it to me himself. Only think of that! to poor old Orpy! The nice young gentleman! Then the marm held her tongue, and the gal pouted. The lad then shook hands with his mother, kissed his sister, and beckoned me out of the house. Then he gave me this little billet, and jumped into the funny carriage, and the *yellow* boy drove off as fast as the old mule could trot. As I shut the gate I saw the marm standing in the door beckoning to me; but I thought I might as well be blind as well as deaf just then, and so I hobbled off as fast as my old legs would carry me."

The note was as follows :

"William Maxwell regrets that the extreme rudeness of his sister should have given so much annoyance to the two young ladies who are visiting Miss Perrit. He assures them that the injury sustained by his sister is very

slight, and need not give them the least uneasiness."

Miss Nancy evidently was much pleased with this polite note. Louisa was in ecstasies, which were somewhat abated when Esther told her she should give an account of the whole affair to her father and mother, and ask their advice.

CHAPTER IX.

PATSY GRACY.

THE next day the girls went to the grotto, fearing lest they should meet Bertha Maxwell.

The beloved grotto! Some one had entirely destroyed its beauty. The pebbles were all scattered, the moss thrown out, the shells broken, and the rustic bench was floating in the brook.

Louisa sat down and cried. Esther tried to console her with the prospect of restoring it to its former condition.

"No, no," she said; "it never will be the same. Only think how beautifully the names Rosamia and Violetta looked in the green moss, with the circle of pure white pebbles around them!"

"Well, it was all a pretty little piece of ro-

mance, and it is passed. We will not play we are fairies any longer. Now the weather is warmer we will fix up the grotto again, and come here sometimes with our books, and study botany. We can gather flowers, you know, and examine them here, and make this a kind of museum. Nobody will want our treasures."

"A museum! Oh, yes, I should like that; but I am afraid, now that hateful Bertha has begun to torment us, she will never leave our things alone."

"We are not sure she was the person who did this mischief."

"I am quite sure, and I say it is a mean revenge."

"*All revenge is mean*, my dear sister. Come, let us try a new walk to-day. We have never wandered far along the brook in that direction. We may find something curious for our museum."

Louisa started up, brushed away the tears, and arm in arm the sisters walked on. When they were more than a mile from Ivy Cottage, a dark cloud suddenly rose. They ran some

distance in a green lane, without knowing whither it would lead, when the rain began to pour.

Under a large pine tree, by the road-side, they saw a young girl seated, with a book on her lap. A cow and two sheep were feeding near her. The sisters took shelter under the tree. The girl started up.

"Don't let us disturb you," said Esther; "we have got caught in a shower, some distance from home."

"Oh, April has not forgotten her old tricks," said the stranger. "We are going to have a pretty smart shower. If it should thunder and lighten, it wouldn't be a safe place under that tree. Run to our house yonder. You see the large red gate; go through it and up to the house. Just knock at the door; mother will bid you come in. I will follow with Mincey and my other pets."

So saying, the girl took up a long stick and hurried her "pets" homeward, while the sisters ran on as fast as they could.

"Come in," said a voice in reply to their knock at the door of a small red house.

A tidily-dressed woman was sitting by the fire in the neat carpeted kitchen. She was spooling woolen yarn.

"Ah, you have been overtaken by an April shower. Take off your bonnets and sacks, and dry your feet."

"Thank you," said Esther, "our sacks are so thick they shed off rain like ducks' wings."

"Papa knew all about March winds and April showers when he bought us these coarse and ugly things," said Louisa, who was so much chagrined at being taken by Mrs. Maxwell for a servant, that she determined this person should know she was *somebody*.

When the woman had put some dry wood on the fire, and placed chairs for the sisters, she inquired if they had seen a girl about their age on the road.

"Here I am, mother dear," she answered for herself, "wet as a drowned rat; and what is worse, my poor book has fallen in the mud, and is thoroughly drenched."

"Let me dry the book," said Esther; "it looks like an old friend—'Adams' Latin Grammar.'"

"So it is. Let it stand while I go and change myself from a drizzle-drazzle to something more decent."

"Patsy is always just so cheerful," said the mother. "While she is looking after the cow and sheep, she finds plenty of time to study and read. She is fond of study, though she never has been to school a day in her life."

"She recites to you, does she not?" asked Louisa, with a doubtful smile.

"Yes, when her brother is absent at college. While he is at home during vacation, he makes her review all she has been over during his absence."

Patsy now came in with a tray in her hands, on which were ginger-cakes and spring water. "Plain fare and a hearty welcome," said she, offering it to her guests.

"This is my mother, Mrs. Gracy," continued she, "and I am Margaret, Peg, Peggy, or Patsy Gracy, just which you please."

"This is Louisa Perrit, and my name is Esther. We are staying with our aunt, Miss Nancy Perrit."

"Indeed! And how is Miss Nancy? I be-

lieve she seldom leaves Ivy Cottage," eagerly inquired Mrs. Gracy.

"Seldom! Never!" replied Louisa. "She is like a snail, always with its house over itself."

"Nancy and I were schoolmates in our girlhood. A lively, pretty girl was she, as smart for study as for play. But times are sadly changed since then," said Mrs. Gracy, with a sigh.

"But we have nice times now, mother, you know we do, only when I drench my old Latin Grammar," Patsy said, as she tried to bend the warped cover of her book back to its original shape.

The shower was now over. The girls thanked Mrs. Gracy and Patsy warmly for their hospitality. Esther doubted if it would please Miss Nancy to have them invite company to Ivy Cottage; indeed, it had been expressly forbidden; but Louisa, delighted to find a lively companion near her own age, said, "You must come and see us, Patsy, very soon."

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Gracy; "we are somewhat like your aunt, we seldom go beyond

our own roof; but we shall be happy to see you here very frequently. Patsy has a fine collection of sea-shells, which she will show you."

"We will come, certainly," replied Louisa.

"If Aunt Nancy will give us permission," said the more prudent Esther.

"Give my kindest regards to her," said Mrs. Gracy.

The rain had left diamond drops on every leaf and every blade of grass, the birds were singing their merriest songs, and the sun was peering out through curtains of gorgeous clouds on the fresh and beautiful earth.

"What nice people those are!" exclaimed Louisa; "and how funny to find them living in that small cottage, and working for their living."

"So intelligent and well-bred, too!" responded her sister; "such real hospitality!"

"And so dreadfully funny to be studying Latin Grammar, and taking care of cows and sheep!"

"I should have thought your love for the romantic would have made you admire a shepherdess."

"Yes, if she wore a real shepherdess hat and

carried a crook ornamented with blue ribbon, and had a little white dog, just as we see in pictures."

"Ah, Louisa dear, you are not the only person who prefers an imaginary picture to plain reality."

Miss Nancy had been much troubled during the absence of her nieces. Again and again had she been to the door and looked out the windows, muttering, "Children are a great deal of trouble. Something dreadful will happen to those girls, and then what will Paul and their mother say?"

When they at last appeared, dancing along full of life and joy, she looked half provoked that she had given herself unnecessary anxiety about them.

They ran to her, and each in turn threw her arms around Miss Nancy's neck and kissed her. She couldn't resist it; her heart was beginning to melt under their warm affection; she actually kissed them in return, but at the same time said, "Naughty girls, where were you during the shower?"

"At Mrs. Gracy's," they both replied.

"Mrs. Gracy's, to be sure! How came you there?"

"Oh, Aunt Nancy, tea is all ready," said Louisa, and I am so hungry. Let us take off our things, and while we are at table we will tell you all about our afternoon's adventure."

"Very well."

They related every circumstance, and concluded with Mrs. Gracy's "kindest regards."

"Poor Mrs. Gracy!" exclaimed Miss Nancy. "She was the richest heiress in this part of the country. She married a gay man, who spent nearly all her property, and then left her with two children. Nobody knows whether he is living or dead. She sends her son Hamilton to college, you say. I wonder how, with her small means, she is able to do so."

"She was winding yarn on spools," said Louisa.

"For the carpet factory, I presume," continued Miss Nancy. "She owns the house where she lives, and a small farm. Her name was Margaret Hamilton, and little did any one dream that the rich heiress would ever have to

eke out her living by working with her delicate hands."

"I observed they were small and delicate, and that her manners were lady-like. May we ask Patsy to come and see us, Aunt Nancy?" timidly urged Esther.

Miss Nancy hesitated a moment, and then replied, "You can ask her to come to your favorite grotto and play with you there."

"Oh, but Aunt Nancy, some cruel wretch has spoiled it entirely," passionately exclaimed Louisa; and then she gave a glowing account of its present condition.

"Just like them—just like them," muttered Miss Nancy; and then she quickly spoke, as though it cost her an effort, "Well, then, you may ask Patsy to come to the house. From what you say, she must be a nice country girl, and not ashamed to work, though she does study Latin Grammar."

CHAPTER X.

WORK AND PLAY.

A FEW days after, the sisters went to pay another visit to Patsy Gracy. As they approached the house, who should they see but Bertha Maxwell mounted on the second rail of the red gate, and her maid, who always followed like a shadow, standing near.

Not far from the gate was a garden, and there was Patsy Gracy hoeing peas.

After what had passed between Bertha and Louisa, the meeting was not likely to be a pleasant one. The gate must be passed, however, as it was the only entrance to the house.

Esther stepped up to it, and said very gently, "Please, let me open this gate," while Louisa hung back, looking fiercely at her enemy.

"No ; I shall not trouble myself to move for you," was the reply.

Patsy threw down her hoe and came to the gate, exclaiming, "Oh, I am right glad to see you, girls. Get off, Miss, and stand back," she said impatiently to Bertha. But Bertha still clung to the gate.

"Then I shall be forced to open it and give you a swing," said Patsy; and the gate swung in on its hinges, Bertha still clinging to it.

Without taking any further notice of her, Patsy said, "Come in, girls, my mother will be very glad to see you."

And they walked to the house without bestowing another glance on the beauty.

Mrs. Gracy was ironing. She made no apology, but continued her work, after having given a cordial welcome to the visitors.

"Have you ever seen that hateful Bertha Maxwell before?" asked Louisa.

"Oh, yes, hundreds of times," replied Patsy. "She frequently comes and looks at me, when I am at work in the garden, for a whole hour at a time. I never take the least notice of her; and as she has been forbidden to speak to any of us country folks, she does not trouble me."

"What flowers are you cultivating in your garden?"

"Papilionaceous ones," replied Patsy, with a merry laugh.

"I do not understand that hard Latin word; I have only just begun to study botany."

"Well, my papilionaceous flowers are peas and beans. When brother was home he planted them, and now they need hoeing, and you found me hard at it. I hope, one of these days, you will come and eat some of them. It seems a wonderful mystery to Bertha Maxwell to see me doing all kinds of work, for I am told she never does anything. Poor thing, I pity her!"

"So do I, most sincerely," replied Esther.

Mrs. Gracy remarked that, in Bertha's case, it was a great misfortune to be beautiful, though it was not necessarily so. Beauty was like any other good gift, to be used as a loan from the giver.

"My brother Hamilton admires Bertha exceedingly," replied Patsy. "He raves about her angelic beauty. I can't see that she is beautiful."

"Angelic!" exclaimed Louisa, contemptuously.

"She is not very amiable, I believe," said Mrs. Gracy; "but Hamilton will not be convinced of the fact until he has some other proof besides hearsay."

Louisa was ready to give her opinion, but Esther interrupted her by inquiring if the young gentleman, Bertha's brother, were not very unlike his sister.

"William Maxwell is a fine fellow; he is my son's most intimate friend at college. They have been like brothers in affection ever since they were little children."

"Damon and Pythias!" whispered Louisa.

Patsy now brought out apples and hickory nuts, over which the girls chatted for an hour, and then they took their leave, after inviting Patsy to come and spend the next afternoon with them.

They had much to talk over on their way home. Many conjectures were made about Hamilton Gracy, and much delight expressed that they had made the acquaintance of Patsy. They went to the grotto, and decided to put it once more in order for their museum; to clean it out neatly, and cover the floor again with moss.

"I wonder how Patsy and her mother can work so cheerfully when they have not been used to it," remarked Louisa, as she was carrying an apronful of moss and pebbles out of the grotto.

Esther laughed, and said, "You work quite as cheerfully yourself."

"Yes; but then this is play."

"Oh, you only work when you play; perhaps Patsy only plays when she works."

"How is that?"

"She may find as much pleasure in real work as you do in this which you call play."

"Can that be possible?"

"It would seem so from her merry face. The day we found her under the tree, she looked as happy and as independent as a queen; and to-day, the way she hoed those 'papilionaceous flowers' was not like that of one who finds hard work a disagreeable task."

"She was thinking, perhaps, how nicely the peas would taste when her brother came home to share them with her. It seems he can work, too, though he is a college student."

When they had removed the rubbish from

the grotto, they swept it out with a broom made of young twigs—a brush-broom, which Esther manufactured; then, finding the bench had floated ashore, they carried it to its former place, and went home quite satisfied with the task they had accomplished. Work it was—hard work, too; and yet, so long as they called it play, it was charming.

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE OF THE BEAUTIFUL.

THE next day great preparations were going on at Ivy Cottage for the expected visitor.

Miss Nancy even allowed some of her flowers to be gathered. Jonquils, and pansies, and snow-drops, and lilac buds were placed in two large goblets on the mantel, each side of the French clock. The new China tea things were brought out, and the beloved silver cream jug and sugar bowl placed with them on the tea-table; then all were covered over with a damask napkin. The baking that was done that day in the kitchen would have sufficed for a large tea party. A rare occurrence—an event of great consequence in Miss Nancy's life was it to receive an invited guest.

And Patsy came soon after dinner, looking

as bright and as cheerful as a June morning. They hastened with her to their own room, to take off her bonnet and shawl. The doors of the book-case happened to be open. Patsy, before she had time to throw aside her bonnet, exclaimed, "Are all those your books?"

"Yes. Would you like to look at them?"

"Indeed I should ; I have but three books of my own, besides my school books and Bible."

Patsy's exclamations of wonder and delight pleased the sisters exceedingly. She made but one objection to their library: "There is too much poetry in it."

"Too much poetry ! Don't you love poetry ?" asked Esther, with surprise.

"No ; I prefer prose. I knew you must be poetical and romantic."

"How did you know that ?" eagerly demanded Louisa.

"Because of the grotto and the fairy names," replied Patsy, laughing.

"Who told you about our grotto ?"

"The same person who told me you called yourselves the fairies Rosamia and Violetta."

"But who could it be ?"

“My brother Hamilton. He and William Maxwell were seated on a bank on the other side of the brook, behind some bushes, the day you found the grotto. They did not like to move for fear you would be frightened, and so they were obliged to hear all you said. They amused themselves with ornamenting the grotto, and they know you only by the names of Rosamia and Violetta.”

“They must have thought us very silly,” said Esther.

“And laughed at us, I dare say,” added Louisa.

“They did laugh, but good-naturedly. I don’t think they are quite as common-place and prosy as I am.”

“Then they did laugh at us,” continued Louisa; “that was too bad. I am half angry with them; are not you, too, Esther?”

“I am more ashamed than angry; and yet, as it was merely for our own amusement, I don’t know that we were so very ridiculous, after all.”

“Ridiculous! By no means; they only thought you had read fairy tales, and were rather romantic.”

"No doubt we are. Aunt Nancy thinks so, too. By the way, we must go down and see her, or she may not like it," said Esther, leading the way down stairs.

Miss Nancy was shy and awkward at first with her young visitor; but Patsy's habitual good nature and frank, cordial manners, soon made her feel at ease, and she inquired with much interest after Mrs. Gracy.

"Now I want to see the famous grotto. Suppose we take a run down to Honey-pot brook—oh, I beg its pardon—to the Delaware," said Patsy.

"To Castalia; I won't be laughed out of it," rejoined Louisa.

To the grotto they went, and the sisters told Patsy all about the beauty's spite against them.

"We are going to have the grotto for a museum now," said Louisa, as they reached the favorite haunt of the fairies.

"Why it is only four big rocks, just piled together!" exclaimed Patsy.

"But the rocks make a grotto, and it was beautiful when the floor was covered with velvet moss and pearly pebbles," said Esther.

“And we have had so much pleasure here; I never enjoyed any spot so much in my life,” added Louisa, warmly.

“It must be because you have always lived in the city;—the rocks are only rocks to me, and the moss is just a kind of common stuff that covers them,” said Patsy.

“But when you examine the moss through our pocket microscope you will not say so. Look here, how beautiful this specimen is, even without magnifying. Don’t you see all those funny little caps with pointed crowns?” said Louisa, showing a bit of moss.

“I have studied Botany, but have never examined plants. I have had too much hard work to do to spare time for it.”

“But don’t you think you can spare an hour or two now and then to come to our museum and help us make a collection of shells, and stones, and flowers, and bees, and butterflies, and everything curious and beautiful?”

“I suspect I have no taste for the beautiful.”

“No taste for the beautiful! is it possible!” exclaimed Esther; “my mother is a dear lover of the beautiful, and she says God has made

beautiful things for us to admire, and given us a sense of beauty, which is a source of great pleasure to us, and ought to be cultivated."

"I am very willing to cultivate it, if there is anything to begin with.—Hush! there comes Beauty herself."

"And Beauty's mother!" exclaimed Louisa, as she perceived Mrs. Maxwell and Bertha approaching.

"Let us retreat into the grotto," said Esther.

"No, no; I shall not retreat," replied Louisa, seating herself on a rock; "Sit by me, Patsy."

"Yes, and *stand by* you, too," Patsy said, casting a look of defiance at the lady and her daughter. Esther in the mean while stood in front of the grotto, looking anxiously at her sister.

"So; you are the naughty children who trouble my Bertha," began Mrs. Maxwell.

"You are mistaken, madam, entirely mistaken," interrupted Patsy; "I never spoke to her but once in my life, and then she would not get off from our gate."

"Oh, ma! *she* is the farm-girl; that one there is the saucy minx who scratched my face," said Bertha, pointing at Louisa.

"She is indeed! How dare you insult and injure my lovely Bertha, in such a shocking manner?" And Mrs. Maxwell waxed wrathful and red.

Esther now came forward. "My sister has a hasty temper, Mrs. Maxwell, and your daughter was very rude, and very provoking. I see no marks of the scratches on her face."

"No; if there had been, I should have gone to law about it."

"I had a letter from my father yesterday, and he wants to know whether you intend to *sew* him up in a bag or to mend his coat. He begs you will excuse him from the former, and he will excuse you from the latter," said Louisa.

"What is the saucy child talking about? I said I would sue him for damages."

"No; you said you would s-e-w *sew* him. I sent him your note."

* "They pretend to be *some pumpkins*, don't they, ma?" said the beauty, contemptuously; "and yet they keep company with the farm-girl, who digs, and rakes, and hoes, and drives cattle."

"Well, does it do you any harm?" demanded Patsy.

“No.”

“Neither does it harm me. It has afforded you some amusement, and I think you ought to be very much obliged to me, for you seem to be sadly in want of occupation.”

“Come, my dear, we are only wasting words on these vulgar persons,” whispered Mrs. Maxwell to her daughter Bertha, but so loud as to be distinctly understood by the rest of the group.

“I have heard my mother say nothing is vulgar but *pretension*,” remarked Louisa, in a contemptuous tone. “She said plainness was not vulgarity—poverty was not vulgarity—ignorance, if it were not wilful ignorance, was a misfortune. Nothing else but *pretension* ought to be called vulgar.”

Mrs. Maxwell was astonished at the boldness of this speech. Patsy clapped her hands, exclaiming, “Good, good!” Bertha drew her mother along, saying, “That girl is the sauciest piece I ever *see*. Suppose we get out of her way as soon as we can.”

The three girls had the civility to refrain from laughter till mother and daughter were

out of sight, and then peal on peal startled the fishes of Honey-pot brook.

They soon after returned to Ivy Cottage, where Miss Nancy was waiting for them, and with keen appetites they partook of her bountiful tea-supper.

MR. PERRIT'S LETTER TO LOUISA.

“Your most welcome letter, my dear child, pleased and amused us, and yet it did not entirely meet your mother’s and my approbation. It is very funny, no doubt, that I am to be ‘*sewed*’ by Mrs. Maxwell. Will she sew me up in a bag, as they threaten to do naughty children? or will she mend my clothing? I beg she will excuse me from the first, and I will excuse her from the last.—And you to scratch Beauty’s face! Really, my dear daughter, I cannot be funny nor witty about this matter, for I feel soberly, almost sadly. I fear there is some naughty envy in your young heart, and a spice of malice towards Bertha Maxwell. Examine well that warm and sometimes generous heart, and see if it be not so. Has not the uncommon beauty of your country neighbor ex-

cited other emotions beside admiration and pity?

“A mistaken and injurious education has developed faults in Bertha which perhaps would never have come to full growth had she been under the charge of your own dear mother. You, who have been blessed with such careful nurture, ought to be more free from faults than you are.

“Just by the window where I am sitting, a clematis is trained over a lattice. Some careful hand has trained it; and yet, in its wild luxuriance, part of the vine trails on the ground; large shoots branch out boldly from the lattice. It is not a well-behaved plant, growing in grace and beauty, as it ought; but, alas, like my own Louisa, too independent of control. Away from us, and unchecked by your prudent mother, you are exhibiting faults that we never dreamed could spring up in our own darling. Check them now at the very outset, and pray to God to help you.

“Beauty is a fearful gift—fearful because of the harm it may do to the possessor, and for the power it confers of doing harm to others. To

the Giver we are responsible for every 'good and perfect gift.' There is a wonderful power in beauty, and no one would willingly relinquish the possession of it. A love of the beautiful is elevating and refining to the whole character. Without it, in nature and art, a woman is common-place, and, I had almost said, coarse, though otherwise endowed with most brilliant talents.

"I would have my daughters strong-minded, and yet delicately feminine; courageous, but not coarse; energetic, but not pushing and obtrusive; efficient in action, but knowing and keeping their right place; able to counsel, but willing to obey; fit to command, yet willing to serve. I would have them particularly careful to maintain what is due to their own sex, and by the loveliness and excellence of their characters, maintain that supremacy over the other sex which was granted to Eve in Eden; but not, alas! to use their power like their unfortunate *alma mater*.

"God bless you, my darling.

"PAUL PERRIT."

CHAPTER XII.

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON.

THE three friends often met at the grotto, at the red house, and at Ivy Cottage. Patsy found that her tasks were every day done, for Esther and Louisa were ready to help her when she was in a hurry in consequence of having played with them.

“I wonder why Mrs. Gracy has no flowers about her house,” said Louisa to Miss Nancy, as they were together training a woodbine over a lattice in the front yard.

“Poor woman! she has no time to cultivate flowers,” replied the aunt.

“But she and Patsy would find time if they loved flowers as *we* do. Patsy finds time to study Latin, and botany, and philosophy, and arithmetic, and ever so many other things.

Don't you think, if she really loved beautiful things, she would at least train a woodbine or a clematis over their ugly red house?"

"Patsy is a smart, hard-working girl; I like her," said Miss Nancy; "she is not ashamed of being a country girl."

"Neither am I ashamed of being a city girl. We did not choose the places where we were born," replied Louisa, with spirit.

Miss Nancy could not help smiling.

"Now," continued Louisa, "I have heard papa talk a great deal about cultivating a love of the beautiful; I am going to try what I can do for Patsy, and you must help me, Aunt Nancy."

"I! How? pray tell me."

"By sending Patsy a bouquet now and then. Why, there is not a flower to be seen about the house, excepting dandelions and daisies. Suppose you send her some flower roots and seeds."

"You are a bold child, and yet I like you."

"*Like me!* You *love* me, you know you do, aunty. Now, let me gather a nice nosegay for Patsy."

"It is like drawing out my very teeth, but I

can't refuse you. Here, take my scissors and cut off the flowers carefully."

"And just give me one root of woodbine and three or four rose bushes to ornament the rough red house."

"You saucy girl!" was Miss Nancy's reply; and yet she took up the woodbine and the rose bushes, and added a clematis of her own accord. Louisa tied up an immense bouquet with a blue ribbon, and placed the roots in a large basket.

Miss Nancy was still among her flowers in the front yard, as the sisters started on their way to Mrs. Gracy's.

"Thank you! thank you! a thousand times," said Louisa, kissing the bouquet and waving it towards her.

Miss Nancy beckoned to her to come back, and going to the gate, leaned over it, and whispered in her ear, "Tell Mrs. Gracy the boy who drives my cows to pasture every morning, can drive hers just as well as not. There is plenty of feed in my meadow-lot. Patsy will then have time to cultivate flowers."

"Thank you a million times. You are kind,

in spite of yourself. When I come back I'll give you a dozen kisses."

"Yes, indeed, Aunt Nancy is very kind to us," said Esther, as they skipped along. "When we came here she seemed so stern and forbidding I was afraid of her, and would not have believed she could become so indulgent. We were of all things not to pick her flowers. Do you know, she told me this morning I might buy a bonnet for her the next time we go to the village!"

"What! is she really going to give up that coal-scoop bonnet? I shouldn't wonder if in time she became quite like other folks."

"And even went to church," added Esther.

Thus they chatted as they went along till they came in sight of Mrs. Gracy's red gate. A stone wall separated a field from the road on which they were walking.

Suddenly a large brown dog came furiously towards them, followed at some distance by men and boys armed with scythes and guns, raising the fearful cry, "Mad dog! mad dog!"

"Jump over the wall," said Esther, snatching the bouquet from Louisa, and throwing it over.

She then took the basket and helped her sister to clamber over the wall. When Louisa was safe, Esther attempted to follow, but catching one foot between the rough stones, the other hung dangling in the air. The dog seized the foot between his teeth and held it fast.

Just at that moment a young man sprang upon the wall with a sharp pitchfork in his hand. Instantly the pitchfork came down with such force on the dog's neck, that his teeth loosened their hold on Esther's foot, and with one bound she was over the wall. The young man pressed his whole weight on the handle of the pitchfork, and held the struggling, foaming dog pinned to the ground, till the crowd came up and with a shower of stones despatched him.

"Are you hurt, darling?" exclaimed Louisa, in agony intense, as Esther sank down on the ground pale as death.

"I don't know. Pray don't touch my shoe, it might harm you."

But Louisa, without heeding this generous caution, untied the shoe all covered with froth, snatched it off, and then drew off the stocking. The delicate foot was red from the severe pres-

sure it had undergone ; but well was it for the dear girl that the shoe was of coarse, tough leather ; the teeth of the mad dog had not penetrated to the flesh. Louisa sat down beside her sister, threw her arms around her neck, and began to cry vehemently.

“My dear sister, let us thank God that we are safe,” whispered Esther.

“And you risked your life for mine !” sobbed out the weeping girl.

The young man now sprang lightly over the wall, and stood beside them. He was in his shirt sleeves—that is, while at work in the field he had thrown aside his coat and waistcoat, and his slender person in its homely guise looked even taller than usual, but neither awkward nor ugly.

“I am afraid you are badly bitten, Miss,” said he to Louisa. “I will run and call my mother.”

“No, no ! I am not hurt ; the horrid dog seized dear Esther’s foot, not mine, and I am crying for joy.”

“Joy because it was your sister’s foot instead of your own ! How selfish !” thought he ; then

turning quickly to Esther, he said, "Let me assist you; we must hurry to the house instantly."

"Thank you, I am not hurt; that is what makes Louisa cry. There comes Mrs. Gracy, followed by Patsy."

"Hamilton, are you safe?" was Mrs. Gracy's first inquiry.

"All safe!" he replied, pointing over the wall, where the dog still lay, surrounded by a gazing crowd of men and boys.

"Esther was the one most in danger. Just look at that shoe covered with foam from the dog's horrid mouth," said Louisa, and then she took off both her own shoes.

Mrs. Gracy shuddered, and looked at Esther as if she thought she would go mad that instant. "Oh, something must be done immediately," she exclaimed, taking hold of Esther's arm; "let me help you into the house."

"I am not hurt; yet my heart beats so violently I can scarcely breathe," Esther replied, endeavoring to rise.

"Put on one of my shoes," said Louisa. "See, she has held on to the basket all this time."

Sure enough, Esther had kept hold of it; and Louisa's feelings, always quick as lightning, were now changed from grief and terror to excessive mirth. She danced about like a wild creature, tossing her shoes up in the air and catching them as they fell, and performing other antics more extraordinary than graceful.

"And where is the bouquet which came bounding over the wall and drew my attention to you?" asked Hamilton Gracy.

"Here it is," said Patsy, who had not before spoken a word. "I, too, can hardly breathe. I was on the top of the hill opposite, when I saw our Hamilton standing on the wall with a pitchfork, pinning the horrid dog to the ground, looking for all the world just like the picture of St. George and the Dragon. I did not see the girls."

"We were then safely on the other side of the wall," responded Esther. "I owe my life to you, sir, and the kind Providence that brought you to my aid."

"Come, we must go into the house," said Mrs. Gracy, placing her arm round Esther's waist.

As they walked on, Louisa, who had attempted to put one of her shoes on Esther and found it too small, still carried them in her hand, and danced round the rest of the party. Suddenly she ran to Patsy, and kissing her, said, "I have come to cultivate your taste for the beautiful."

"Beauty of motion?" asked Patsy, roguishly.

"Now, Patsy, you ought to be ashamed to make fun of me. I have brought you a woodbine and a clematis to train over the front door, and rose bushes for the front yard. The bouquet you may place where you please."

"Fairy gifts, worthy of Rosamia, the queen of the fairies," said Hamilton Gracy.

"Ah, now you are mischievous, Damon or Pythias, whichever you are; but set out these vines and bushes and I will forgive you," replied Louisa, with perfect good humor.

Louisa pointed out the spots where they should be placed, and Hamilton set them in the ground. The bouquet ornamented the mantel-piece.

After partaking of cream and strawberries, the visitors started for Ivy Cottage, accompanied by Patsy and her brother.

On the way, Louisa told Patsy of her aunt's offer of pasture for the cow in the meadow-lot, and of the boy to drive the cow and the sheep.

"But will he treat Mincey kindly?" she asked, with much anxiety.

"Of course he will. Aunt Nancy wouldn't trust her cows with him if he did not drive them carefully."

"You know Mincey is my beloved pet. We have reared her from a calf, and she is the sweetest, dearest little cow in the whole world."

Louisa laughed at the idea of a pet cow, and Patsy defended her taste, saying, "I don't see why a pet cow is not as pretty and nice as a pet dog, a pet horse, or a pet donkey."

"But flowers, Patsy, lovely flowers! you will have time to attend to them, and I will help you cultivate a taste for the beautiful."

"And I will cultivate yours for the useful."

"Very well; it's a bargain, Patsy dear. How came your brother to be at home just when he was most wanted?"

"He is home for vacation, and takes the time to aid us about farming and gardening."

"Well, we must show him our museum, with

its specimens to illustrate natural history, to prove to him that we, too, have a taste for the useful. Here is the place to turn from the road and take the walk by the brook."

Esther and young Gracy were lagging behind. He had offered her his arm, wishing as he did so that he had put on his coat. She took it gladly, for, in addition to her exhaustion and fatigue, she was shuffling along in one of Patsy's large shoes. She declined going to the grotto, and they kept the road. They had not gone far when they met Mrs. Maxwell and her daughter driving out in the vehicle which Louisa called the shandrydan. Gracy saw only one object—the beautiful face of Bertha Maxwell. The yellow boy *in livery*, the gray mule, the odd-looking carriage, passed by, and he saw but that beautiful face.

As soon as they were out of sight, "Is she not perfectly lovely?" exclaimed he, drawing a long breath, as though breath itself had been suspended while he gazed at the beauty.

"No, she is not lovely at all," replied Patsy; "she is hateful."

"I think she *is* very beautiful," said Esther.

“But very disagreeable, like that stramonium there, with its delicate lilac flowers,” responded Louisa, pointing to a plant by the roadside.

“I cannot believe it possible that such a countenance as Miss Maxwell’s could belong to one who was not angelic in character. She may be proud. I confess, she gave me a contemptuous glance,” said Gracy, taking the old straw hat from his head and twirling it on his hand. “No doubt I appeared to her like a very respectable scarecrow.”

Esther thought, in spite of the hat ‘an’ a’ that,’ he was a fine young man, with his hair somewhat disarranged, his complexion bronzed, and his hands not as delicate as they would have been had he been playing the piano instead of pitching hay.

Patsy, in the most voluble and violent manner, repeated the wrongs her friends had suffered from Bertha. Her brother shook his head doubtfully, as much as to say, “Impossible! It must have been some one else.”

As they approached Ivy Cottage, old Orpy hobbled forward to meet them. “Make haste,

for marcy's sake," she cried; "Miss Nancy is taken very bad, and I don't know what to do for her."

They hastened onward. Esther found that her aunt had been violently seized with cramps, and was suffering intensely. Without asking permission of the sufferer, she despatched Gracy for a physician, and Patsy ran home to summon her mother.

Miss Nancy was still in great distress when they both arrived, and gladly accepted their services. The violence of the attack yielded to medicine, but she was left very feeble. Esther sat up with her all night, and nursed her with tenderness and gentle kindness.

Ah, how many times that night did the grateful girl thank God for the wonderful escape she had had from the very jaws of the infuriated dog. Time and again, as she sat in an arm chair beside Miss Nancy's bed, her weary eyelids would droop for a moment, and then she would see the horrid creature rushing towards her, with his wide red mouth open, and his great fiery eyes glaring upon her; and starting wide awake with a chill of horror creeping over

her, she would fall on her knees in devout thanksgiving.

Miss Nancy continued ill for some weeks. Mrs. Gracy came often to see her, and aided her young nurses in the care of their patient. Both the sisters had been much devoted to her, but Esther was peculiarly calculated for ministering to the sick and suffering. Her patience, quietness, and gentleness were united with good judgment and good sense. She received the physician's orders with calm attention, and executed them with scrupulous fidelity.

As Miss Nancy grew better, her heart warmed more and more towards her kind nieces; indeed, she loved them tenderly; but, moreover, there was a higher emotion stirring in her heart, gratitude and love to God.

The long-neglected Bible and a prayer-book were now placed on a table beside her bed, and Esther frequently selected portions of Scripture to read aloud, and then with Louisa knelt and performed morning and evening devotions in that sick room.

CHAPTER XIII.

ESTHER'S INFLUENCE.

“AND so you have sat in the clergyman’s pew ever since the first Sunday you went to church here,” remarked Miss Nancy one day, after she had entirely recovered her health.

“Yes; he invited us to sit in his pew, and there is room for you, too,” replied Esther, quite delighted.

“Eighteen years have passed since I have put my foot inside of a church-door; and eighteen more might have come and gone in the same heathenish way with me, if it had not been for your influence, Esther. I think I will go to church next Sunday; but you and Louisa must do some shopping for me in the village, and buy me suitable things to wear.”

Gladly did the sisters go to execute their aunt’s commissions.

“How nice Aunt Nancy will look in a fashionable straw bonnet trimmed with white ribbon, and a lavender lawn dress,” said Louisa.

“And the white erape shawl that dear papa sent her, which she has never worn,” added Esther.

Just as they reached the village they heard quick footsteps behind them, and were startled by a voice which they had heard but once before, saying, “Excuse me, young ladies, for addressing you ; I have a message for you from my friend, Hamilton Gracy. He sails for Europe in a few days, and as I was coming home, he requested me to say he was very sorry not to have seen you again before he left the country.”

“And Mrs. Gracy and Patsy, do they know that he is going ?” inquired Louisa.

“Yes ; they went to the city this morning to take leave of him. A gentleman made Gracy an excellent offer to accompany his son as tutor, to make the tour of Europe ; and though his college course was not completed, he consented to go, not only because of the advantage to himself, but because he could thus do more for his mother and sister.—My name is William

Maxwell, and I have the honor to be Gracy's most intimate friend."

"Damon and Pythias!" whispered Louisa.

"Violetta and Rosamia!" Maxwell said, with a smile; and then, making a formal polite bow, he bade them "Good morning," and hastened onward.

"What will become of the corn and beans, the hay and the turnips, at the red house, without their very respectable scarecrow?" exclaimed Louisa, laughing.

Esther looked very seriously at her sister, and remarked, "You surely do not despise Hamilton Gracy because he was raking hay without a coat, wore coarse boots and an old straw hat. Don't you know 'the man's the man for a' that, and for a' that,' as Burns says?"

"Yes; but I had rather see him well dressed, neat and trim, like Maxwell."

"Yet your neat and trim Maxwell is proud to have the respectable scarecrow for his intimate friend. No doubt Gracy holds a high standing in his class."

"But Maxwell is a gentleman," continued Louisa.

"So is Hamilton Gracy—every inch a gentleman," warmly replied Esther.

"Excepting the few inches of elbow which had poked themselves through his shirt sleeves," retorted Louisa, giggling.

"Now, my dear sister, I am ashamed of you."

"You need not be; I am a lover of the beautiful."

"Did you never hear of such a thing as moral beauty?"

"Yes; and I see it before me now," said Louisa, looking her sister lovingly in the face.

One bonnet after another was tried on. This was too old—that too young; but at length they chose a plain straw trimmed with white ribbon.

"With a few flowers inside this will do nicely," said Louisa.

"No, Louisa, not flowers for her; they would not become her at all."

"But I shall buy some with my own money, and I know she will wear them to please me. Here are some lilies of the valley mingled with white rose buds; put them in the bonnet," continued Louisa to the milliner. "They

are beautiful, and Aunt Nancy dearly loves flowers."

Miss Nancy, to the surprise of Esther, accepted Louisa's gift, and wore the flowers.

* * * * *

Poor old Orpy! No one rejoiced more heartily than she did when Miss Nancy Perrit appeared in the church at Sylvania on that famous Sunday. There was staring among young and old as it was whispered from one to another that the queer old maid, who lived at Ivy Cottage, had actually come to church with the strangers who sat in the minister's pew. She did not look odd; she did not look old; she did not look ugly: she was a nice, highly-respectable looking person. Mrs. Maxwell inquired of the sexton as she passed out of church who the lady was in the minister's pew, and blushed deeply when he answered, "Miss Perrit."

Miss Nancy saw and heard none of these things. She trembled as she walked up the aisle, and held tightly by Esther's arm; but after the services commenced, she listened with devout attention, and united in the worship of God with a sincere and earnest heart.

Mrs. Gracy and Patsy joined Miss Nancy and her nieces on the way home.

"We parted with Hamilton with keen regret," said Mrs. Gracy; "and yet I trust it was all for the best. Patsy bore it bravely."

Large tears streamed down Patsy's face; she could not speak. Her brother was so much to her—play-fellow, friend, adviser, protector, teacher.

And tears of sympathy were in Esther's eyes, for had he not saved her life!

It was a beautiful evening in the latter part of June. Earth had put on her most glorious attire. The air was perfumed with the mingled essence of hundreds of fresh flowers, and the song of birds and the hum of honey-laden bees floated upon it. The friends walked slowly home from the "house of God," taking sweet counsel together. A holy, happy Sunday was it to all.

Three little months had effected a mighty change in the solitary misanthrope, Miss Nancy Perrit. The affections which had lain dormant, or been lavished upon unresponsive animals, had been called out. She blessed the day

which brought the sisters, with their carpet-bag, to the gate of the log-house, which they had beautified with their presence, and adorned with the name of Ivy Cottage.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

Two months more passed rapidly away, and they were to leave Ivy Cottage, Esther and Louisa, who had given such a charm to it.

A letter from Mr. Perrit summoned them to be ready to take their departure whenever he should come for them. With Patsy they went to pay a farewell visit to the beloved brook and the precious grotto.

The brook, which in the spring Louisa had considered quite a river, was now so shallow in many places, that she could cross it without going over shoes, by stepping from stone to stone. The waterfall was a scanty rill, just one silvery streak in the midst of the green trees which hung over and around it. Yet it was Castalia still to the sisters, who loved it as well

as their father did before them, but with a more romantic affection.

Patsy could scarcely understand their sentimental tears as they bid the brook farewell. To her it was a nice stream for Mincey to drink from and to stand in, when the weather was hot, and the cow chose to chew the cud and meditate.

The grotto with its museum they bequeathed to Patsy. There they had of late collected shells and studied conchology, flowers and botany, beetles, butterflies, bees, and entomology.

"You must keep the museum in order till we come again," said Louisa, looking at the treasures it contained with a sorrowful countenance.

"I will carry everything there is here to our house, and keep all till you make us another visit."

"But the specimens would not look like anything out of the grotto. They are only beautiful here."

"The snow would bury them all up in winter, or mischievous boys or girls might steal them."

"Never mind; I would rather they should be left as they are, Patsy. I want to think of the fairy grotto when I am away, just as I leave it."

"So do I," added Esther.

"Well, you are very queer girls; I can't quite understand you," said Patsy, with a puzzled expression shading her honest face.

"I confess we are too romantic," replied Esther; "but romance will wear away as the realities of life press upon us—at least, so my mother says, and I have never known her to say anything that was not wise and true."

Of late they had not met Bertha Maxwell in their rambles. She had been for some weeks absent from home with her mother. Just as they were leaving the grotto, Esther exclaimed, "There comes Beauty, floating along like a fairy-dove."

Dressed in thin white muslin, with a floating blue sash, and blue ribbons on her white chip hat, she came tripping along the path, for once alone.

"No wonder your brother calls her angelic," whispered Esther to Patsy.

Bertha walked directly up to the group, and said, "Ma and I have been to Saratoga. There we met the Hon. Paul Perrit and his lady. Who would ever have thought you girls belonged to such grand people! Ma could hardly believe it, especially as you keep company with *that are* farm-girl."

"Margaret Gracy is the sister of your brother's most intimate friend," replied Esther.

"More's the pity for our Bill for choosing such low companions. You must know, girls, I ran away from ma this morning. She is dressed to kill, and you see I have on my very best. She determined to call on you right away after we got home. Our carriage stood before the door; but when I thought of the *splendiferous* coach that you ride in, with the grand black horses, I wouldn't come with our shabby concern, and a poor, *miserable* gray mule. So, you see, I ran away, and thought I might find you here."

"What is the girl talking about?" inquired Patsy.

"I suppose she has seen father and mother

in *our* carriage, that's all," replied Louisa, with an effort to appear indifferent.

"So I did, and it was the handsomest turnout at Saratoga—'not dashing, but elegant,' I heard a gentleman say. Only think of ma's calling you servants! She is so ashamed she don't know what to do, and she is going to make her apology. Good enough for her. I am glad to have her eat humble pie sometimes, she is so fussy proud."

"Do you say that of your own mother?" asked Patsy, indignantly, while Esther whispered to Louisa:

"What will poor Aunt Nancy do if Mrs. Maxwell calls? We had better hurry home."

They started off, accompanied by the beauty.

"I might have had nice fun with you if we had only known who you was," said Bertha.

The girls made no reply; she continued:

"You would be astonished to see how everybody stared at me at Saratoga. They thought I was just a piece of wax-work. I could hear people in the street and everywhere say, 'How beautiful!' It is not strange if *I* am proud;

but I don't know what ma has got to be proud of but me."

"And your brother," remarked Louisa.

"No; he is homely as a horse's head."

"I don't think so," said Louisa.

"Ma says he is. She don't care half as much for Bill as she does for me;" and she tossed her pretty head with a silly conscious air.

"Perhaps she spent her spoiling on you, and it has been all the better for him," said Patsy.

"Who are you to talk so to me? I don't believe you ever wore anything better than a calico frock since you was born; and I never wear calico, morning, noon, nor night."

"Well, your soul's made of calico if your body is silk. I would rather have a satin soul in a calico body," said Patsy, laughing.

"I didn't come here to meet you, farm-girl. You'd better go home and hoe corn, or feed your cow, than to be here with your betters."

"Please to be more polite to my friend," said Esther, reddening with anger, while Louisa bit her tongue for fear she should say something dreadful.

As they came in sight of the cottage, sure

enough there was the shandrydan before the door. Orpy was leaning over the gate, screaming at the top of her voice, "Miss Nancy won't see you ; Miss Nancy won't see you."

Mrs. Maxwell fairly yelled in return, "Tell Miss Perrit it is Mrs. Maxwell come to pay her respects to her and the young ladies."

Orpy shook her head fiercely, repeating, "Miss Nancy won't see you ; sartain sure she won't."

"I knew she wouldn't. I told her so before we started from home. Come, let's hide here," said Bertha, concealing herself behind some tall seringas and lilacs in the front yard.

The girls followed her example, glad to escape an encounter. Mrs. Maxwell, after throwing her card to Orpy, drove off.

The sisters were reluctantly compelled to admit Bertha to the parlor.

"What a little bit of a room!" said Bertha. "How odd it must seem to you who have lived in such a grand house."

"It seems very pleasant to us," replied Esther. "My father was born in this house."

"How strange ! In a log house !"

"There was once a better man than he born in a stable," said Patsy.

"Was there? I never heard of such a thing," Bertha replied, looking quite bewildered.

Esther, feeling that the allusion was too sacred and not in good taste, immediately added, "My father is devotedly attached to his birth-place. You ought to hear with what enthusiasm he speaks of the beautiful scenery about Sylvania, and all the haunts of his boyhood."

"I am sure I never should speak of Sylvania if I lived in the city. I hate the country."

"And I adore it," exclaimed Patsy.

"Shall I not see that queer woman, your aunt?" asked Bertha.

"I believe she is engaged; she is generally occupied in the morning," said Esther.

"Making bread, I suppose."

"Yes; she makes excellent bread. Would you like some?"

"No; I should rather have some cake."

"A broad hint," whispered Patsy to Louisa.

Esther felt compelled to take the hint, and went to find her aunt. She hunted all over and about the house in vain. Then she thought she

would go to the pantry and get some cake, as Miss Nancy had told them always to help themselves. She shook, and pulled, and rattled at the pantry door for some time, and found it locked. Pausing a moment, she heard some one saying very softly, "Who's there? What do you want?"

"It is I. Is it you, Aunt Nancy?" as softly responded Esther.

"Yes; I would not see those Maxwells in my house for a thousand dollars."

Esther could not help being amused. She went back to the parlor, and said, "I beg you will excuse me, Miss Maxwell, the pantry is locked, and I cannot offer you a lunch."

"That stingy old maid, I dare say, locks up everything from you. I don't doubt you are half starved."

"You are greatly mistaken, Miss," replied Louisa, indignantly; "she gives us the nicest and best of sweet country fare, and we have grown so plump in five months that dear father and mother will hardly know us."

"I ought to have been home long before this time," said Patsy. "Good bye! I shall see

you again to-morrow. You have promised to come and take tea with me."

"Yes; meet us half way," said Esther, kissing Patsy.

"Every one to their taste, as the old woman said when she kissed her cow," muttered Bertha.

Patsy had been gone but a moment when the others were startled by a loud rap at the front door. The girls all ran to the door. It was Mrs. Maxwell's yellow coachman. Mrs. Maxwell had returned. Seeing Bertha, she exclaimed, "Come here, you naughty thing! You have given me an awful fright. You said you were going to your room because you did not feel well enough to make a call."

"So I did; but I didn't say I was going to stay in my room."

"Come here, you hussey; you have been tramping through the fields and over the rocks with them new blue kid shoes and your fine muslin dress."

Mrs. Maxwell in her anger quite forgot the presence of the daughters of the Hon. Paul Perrit; suddenly it came to her mind: "I beg

your pardon, young ladies, my Bertha is very contrary this morning. I had the pleasure to see your respected father and mother at Saratoga lately, and I have left my card for your aunt this morning. I hope we shall see you soon at Linden Hall."

Esther bowed, but Louisa and Bertha laughed.

"Good bye, girls," said the beauty; "I have had a mighty nice time. Don't you admire our carriage?"

So saying she jumped in, and they drove off.

Poor Miss Nancy! Glad was she to escape from the "durance vile" of the pantry.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. PERRIT'S FANCY SKETCH.

THE next day Esther received a letter from her parents, informing her that before returning to the city they were to go to Niagara. As they were in great haste, they would only stop at Ivy Cottage for a short time, and Esther and Louisa must be ready to leave. All was now hurry and bustle, for they might leave that very day.

“Niagara ! glorious Niagara !” exclaimed Esther ; “how kind it is in dear mother to take us with her.”

“I would rather see our sweet Castalia any day, than great Niagara,” replied Louisa, with tears in her eyes.

Miss Nancy came into their room while the girls were packing their trunks, and seating

herself on the side of the bed, covered her face with her hands, and waving backwards and forwards, said nothing, but now and then breathed a sigh, which was almost a groan.

“Dear Aunt Nancy,” said Esther, “we shall come and see you again. We are to take nothing away but our trunks; all our books and country clothing we are to leave. Surely papa intends to have us come again next summer.”

“But the long winter.”

“Oh, I will send you a parrot, Aunt Nancy,” said Louisa.

She meant it for kindness; but Miss Nancy had lost her love for parrots since she had felt the sweeter love for children. The offer sounded cruel to her sorrowing heart, and she sobbed aloud.

“Perhaps you will be so kind as to come and see us,” timidly suggested Esther. “We will do all in our power to make you happy.”

“I know you would, my dear child; I know you would. You have done me more good since you have been here than I can tell. If I should never see you again on earth, I shall hope to meet you in heaven.”

The sound of wheels was heard. Esther and Louisa ran to the window, and there were Mr. and Mrs. Paul Perrit in the very same wagon that brought them first to Ivy Cottage.

The girls were soon in the arms of their parents. Miss Nancy now, instead of shrinking from her brother, greeted him and his good little wife in the most cordial manner, and showed them into her cosy parlor.

A dear little woman was Mrs. Perrit. There was a calm repose in her manner, and her countenance was grave, but the sweetest, the most human of smiles gave a charm to it more pleasing than perfect beauty of feature.

"These girls don't look much like fairies, sister," said Mr. Perrit. "The country air and your wholesome table has made them as chubby as cherubs and as rosy as milk-maids."

"Milk-maids! That reminds me of our milk-maid and shepherdess, Patsy Gracy. We are engaged to take tea with her this afternoon," said Louisa.

"You can keep your engagement, for we do not leave till early to-morrow morning—that is,

if we are not encroaching on your hospitality, sister Nancy."

"Not at all; I only wish you could make a longer stay."

The change in Miss Nancy's manner was wonderful and delightful to her brother. The change in her dress was equally remarkable. A neat, becoming cap and a white morning-dress made her look ten years younger than she did in the spring.

Esther proposed that they should pass a couple of hours at Mrs. Gracy's and return to tea, and bring Patsy with them. To this arrangement Louisa willingly agreed.

"I shall go with you to Mrs. Gracy's," said Mr. Perrit, as his daughters, two hours after dinner, were ready to start. "I looked up to Margaret Hamilton with wonder and admiration when I was a boy. She was a rich heiress,—a bright, particular star. Fortunate for me that I did not fall in love with her," said he, casting a grateful glance at his little wife. "We must go by the grotto and the brook, of course—the chosen haunt of the fairies so

beautiful, and the inspiring fountain of romance and poetry."

"Now, papa, indeed you are laughing at us; we will not take you there," said Louisa.

"Then I shall go by myself after I have left you at Mrs. Gracy's, and perhaps I shall be inspired to write a poem or draw a picture. Don't you think I could coax Beauty to sit long enough on her favorite rock for me to take her portrait?"

"You saw Bertha Maxwell at Saratoga; do you not think her very beautiful?" asked Esther.

"Yes, indeed, poor thing! She was taken to be exhibited there, just as old Joyce Heth and the rhinoceros were, only the spectators were not charged twenty-five cents apiece. Come, we must be off. I shall perhaps introduce the shepherdess into my poem or picture."

"There, papa, do you see that woodbine and that wild clematis growing over the small porch before that ugly red house?" asked Louisa, as they approached Mrs. Gracy's. "I carried them there, and Hamilton Gracy built the porch on purpose for them."

"Is that Mrs. Gracy's house?" he asked with surprise. "What a change for Margaret Hamilton!"

Mrs. Gracy made no apologies for that change, but received Mr. Perrit with easy dignity. Patsy, too, was as easy and as unembarrassed as if she had welcomed her friends to a palace.

Mr. Perrit did wander by Honey-pot brook on his return, and amused himself not a little by examining the contents of the grotto museum. "Time well spent by those girls, and highly enjoyed," said he. He was inspired, perhaps by the gentle murmur of Castalia, to draw a picture,* though beautiful Bertha was not there to sit for her likeness.

When Esther and Louisa returned to Ivy Cottage, they brought Patsy with them. On their way they overtook Mr. Perrit.

"Here is a pencil-sketch, partly imaginary and partly true. I have named it 'OUR BOUQUET,'" said he, exhibiting the drawing.

In the background was the grotto and the rocky banks of the brook. In the foreground

* Frontispiece. See page 81.

the fight for the bouquet between Louisa and Bertha, Esther looking on, her hands held up in amazement. In one corner was Patsy, under a tree, wearing a shepherdess hat, and holding a crook ornamented with flowers, a cow and two sheep feeding near by.

"Now, papa, that is not at all like the reality. Where is the German maid?" asked Louisa.

"She has not come in sight yet."

"And the shepherdess, how came *she* there?"

"That is our little friend Patsy. Painters take licenses as well as poets. The old masters even brought in their own likenesses in scenes from the Bible."

"Nobody but the painters would recognize their likenesses if they did not look more like the originals than that does like me," said Louisa, pettishly.

"You don't look like yourself when you are angry, my child; and you perceive even beautiful Bertha is almost ugly when she fights for OUR BOUQUET."

"And I look like a picture on a French fan," said Patsy.

"And what do you intend to do with the drawing?" asked Esther, laughing.

"Have it engraved and framed, most certainly. But here we are at Ivy Cottage, as your romance has it."

"Now, papa, I hope you don't dislike romance," remarked Esther.

"I do not when it is regulated by common sense, and without dazzling the mental vision, sheds a halo round sober reality."

"I don't *quite* understand you, papa," said Louisa.

"Neither do I, at all," added Patsy.

"Well, then, put the remark down in your note-books for future consideration and the remembering of after years. It is a very useful plan thus to write down scraps of poetry or prose, marked, '*for future consideration.*'"

They found Miss Nancy's bountiful tea-table waiting their arrival.

"No wonder I have a pair of dumpling daughters to carry away from Ivy Cottage," Mr. Perrit playfully remarked as he surveyed the loaded table. "Why, sister, you have *la crème, de la crème*, in the country."

“Oh, mamma, you must taste my preserved strawberries. I gathered them and made them all myself,” said Louisa.

“And my cake, too,” added Esther.

“I hope your knowledge of the culinary art is not confined to what may be called the embroidery or fancy work—sweetmeats and cake,” replied her father.

“No, indeed, papa; Aunt Nancy has taught us to make bread, biscuits, cake, custards, puddings, pies, pickles, preserves,—to bake, to stew, to roast, to fry, to broil, to fricasse, to boil,—and to—to—make soap and smoke hams,” rattled Louisa, quite out of breath.

“What an array of accomplishments! I am exceedingly obliged to her; but have you actually put your dainty hands in dough?”

“I have,” replied Esther; “and the bread you are now eating will prove whether I am a mere *amateur* performer.”

“I, being a *connoisseur* in the matter, pronounce you a capital performer. I am quite as well pleased with your skill in bread-making as I was with your splendid execution on the

piano at Madame Le Fevre's school concert; and the butter is a *chef d'œuvre*."

"Ah, papa, I wish I ever could tell when you are jesting and when you are in earnest," exclaimed Louisa, while Esther's face glowed with pleasure. "The butter Patsy brought us; she churned it herself," continued Louisa. "Isn't it *elegant*?"

"It is as yellow as California gold, and sweet and rich as a nut; but, my dear, it is not *elegant*. That is an epithet we should rarely use. It implies the added grace of art to what is beautiful. A lady may be beautiful, but she is not elegant unless dressed with taste. Her manners may be pleasing, but not elegant unless they possess grace and refinement. A house may be large, expensive, and convenient, but not elegant unless art has decorated it. I think I have heard you speak of elegant chickens, an elegant cow, and now of elegant butter."

"You are rather severe on poor Louisa," said Mrs. Perrit.

"I do not intend to be; I only wish her to use language properly."

"I shall be afraid to open my lips before you, sir," said Patsy.

"What! you who study Latin and understand all the *ologies*! You know what *elegantin* means, and would not send your butter to market labeled, 'Elegant butter at twenty cents per pound.'"

"I agree with Louisa; I don't know, sir, when you are in fun and when you are in earnest," replied Patsy.

"In sober earnest, I admire you and your golden butter, and rejoice that you have found time to study Latin and the *ologies* without neglecting your appropriate duties."

"Thank you, sir; besides, through the beautiful influence of Esther and Louisa, the *utile cum dulce* is beginning to dawn upon my prosaic mind," replied Patsy, with a mischievous smile.

So anxious were the sisters that Patsy should make a favorable impression on their father and mother, that their lips actually and involuntarily moved like hers with every word she uttered.

When tea was over, the sisters, attended by

their father, walked home with their young friend, and bade her a loving "Farewell."

After the parting, they walked on in sad silence for a while.

"A nice girl Patsy Gracy is—a very nice girl indeed," said Mr. Perrit, as if soliloquizing.

The sisters were quite satisfied with this opinion.

Early next morning Mr. and Mrs. Perrit, with their daughters, bade adieu to Miss Nancy. They left her leaning over the gate with a sorrowful countenance, while poor old Orpy stood at the door with her apron to her weeping eyes, sobbing out, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven!"

We must now bid farewell to *our* friends the Perrits for a long time.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SAD FAREWELL.

MRS. MAXWELL had been for several years keeping up appearances on very small means; or, to be more plain, she endeavored to live like a rich person when she was not rich at all. She had been exceedingly extravagant during her married life, and after Mr. Maxwell's death all his property went to pay his debts, excepting what the law allowed to his widow. She still remained at Linden Hall, though the place was far too expensive for her, and every year she found herself getting deeper and deeper in debt.

When William Maxwell came home for the fall vacation he had just entered the Senior class in college, and expected to pass another year to complete his collegiate education. Sad-

ly disappointed was he when his mother told him she could not possibly afford to have him return to college.

"But what am I to do, mother?" he anxiously demanded.

"Go and seek your fortune, as other young men do; I have maintained you long enough," was the stern reply.

William was not his mother's favorite. He had not a friend in the world, excepting Hamilton Gracy and a few other young class-mates.

"Seek my fortune! Where, on the wide earth, am I to find it?" exclaimed the inexperienced boy of eighteen years, whose life had been that of a secluded student—whose whole ambition had been to be distinguished as a scholar. He turned to Bertha: "Have you no word of sympathy to offer to your brother?"

"Sympathy! No! I am sure, if I was a man, I should like of all things to go and seek my fortune, just like the brave fellows in story-books."

Poor boy! He was anything but brave at that moment. His throat throbbed with intense emotion, and his large eyes were swimming in

tears; but he choked down feeling, and proudly dashed away the obtrusive tears.

“When shall I go, mother?”

“The sooner the better. I don’t know what will become of Bertha and me, unless you can do something for us.”

“I hope you have enough for yourself and Bertha, if you have not for me.”

“No, I have not. We must give up Linden Hall.”

“And where are you going?”

“I shall place Bertha in a fashionable boarding-school for two or three years, to complete her education, and meantime I shall take cheap lodgings somewhere in the neighborhood of the school. She must have accomplishments, and then her beauty will make her fortune.”

A bitter smile passed over the expressive countenance of William Maxwell as he said, “Am I to be thrust upon the world without a dollar in my pocket?”

“No; I will pack up all your clothes for you, and give you ten dollars; it is all the ready money I can possibly muster.”

“Mother!” It was all the boy could say;

he turned, flew to his room, and locked himself in for two long hours.

In anticipation of the event, Mrs. Maxwell had made such arrangements as she deemed needful for her son's departure. His wardrobe was not very extensive, yet his clothing was neat and respectable. During the day every needful preparation was made, and in the evening a small black trunk and a carpet-bag were to be seen in the front entry of Linden Hall.

The next morning the carriage with the gray mule was at the door, to take William Maxwell to the Sylvania station.

He extended his hand to his mother; he could not speak.

"Good-bye, William; I hope you will do well in the world. Let us hear from you sometimes."

He kissed Bertha.

"Don't cry, Bill," said she, "it is too girlish. Why, you almost make *me* cry, too."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BEAUTY AT SCHOOL.

PETTED, unrestrained, and almost idolized by her mother, how was Bertha Maxwell to accommodate herself to the equality of a boarding-school !

Mrs. Maxwell chose a fashionable and expensive school for her daughter in the city. In order to do this with her small means, she boarded with a very plain family about two miles out of town, and every Saturday walked into the city to a fashionable hotel. In the parlor of this hotel she received Bertha, having made an arrangement with the landlord of the Lamartine House for this purpose. It was supposed, of course, by the companions whom Bertha frequently brought with her, that Mrs. Maxwell was living at the Lamartine House.

The school girls were in raptures with the new scholar. Beautiful!—sweet!—glorious!—handsome!—lovely!—splendid!—magnificent! They exhausted upon her their vocabulary of epithets in commendation of beauty.

Her rich silk dresses (they were made over out of her mother's) were thought not quite fashionable; but then they were so expensive, she must be wealthy. Her whole wardrobe was more expensive than had ever been seen before at Mrs. Hoppington's Seminary.

These were great recommendations to the favor of silly girls, and yet they excited envy. Bertha must be very kind and sweet to gain their love, in spite of her superior advantages.

Her teachers soon found out her deplorable ignorance. She had had French maids and German maids, that she might speak French and German. She had caught a smattering of each, and mingled them strangely together. Moreover, these maids had been uneducated persons, who spoke their own language ungrammatically and pronounced it abominably, so that Bertha had to unlearn all she had acquired

of them. In English studies she was behind even the youngest scholars in school, and could hardly utter a correct sentence in her own language.

Not a week had passed before the beauty was pronounced by her school-mates proud and disagreeable. The airs she assumed were intolerable. She expected from her room-mates entire submission to her will in everything. As she had always been waited upon, and never done anything for herself, her companions were frequently called upon: "Come and tie my shoe," "Hook my dress," "Hand me my books."

At first they replied, "Ask us, if you please, instead of commanding us;" but soon they said, "We are not your servants; we did not come here to wait on you."

She became home-sick, and begged her mother to take her home. But Mrs. Maxwell had given up Linden Hall, and had no home. Bertha must stay where she was. For the first time in her life she was forced to submit to what was exceedingly against her own will.

After some severe experience, and much

pouting and crying, Bertha Maxwell was broken in and obliged to conform to the rules of the school, and to treat her companions with civility. Yet she was no favorite.

After a while her silk dresses became greasy and shabby, and there were none to replace them. Her mother denied herself every luxury and almost every comfort in order to pay the large school bills as they became due.

During the vacations Bertha was with her "in the country." She never mentioned at school that three weeks were passed under the humble roof where her mother boarded.

Those vacations! What patching and darning, what washing and starching and dyeing and furbishing over, to make Bertha's clothing look "almost as well as new."

The Beauty complained bitterly because the girls asked if her things were to last forever; they wondered why she never had anything fashionable.

Poor, mistaken Mrs. Maxwell! Would she had labored and spent her strength for better purposes. Bertha was not grateful for all the sacrifices she made in her behalf.

Nearly two years had thus passed, and Bertha had learned to play on the piano—a little; enough, however, to give pleasure to any one. She had learned, in fact, a *little* of everything commonly taught at fashionable boarding-schools—and to dance very well. She had, in fact, learned just enough of her various studies, to forget them with perfect ease. All this time not a word had been heard from William Maxwell, since the day he left Linden Hall. Did not his mother think sometimes of her absent son? Often; and with severe reproaches of conscience.

* * * * *

One Saturday, early in autumn, Bertha went as usual to the Lamartine House to see her mother. The teacher, who was out with a number of scholars, left her there for an hour, to call for her on returning from a walk.

Mrs. Maxwell was not at the hotel herself, but there was a note from her, written in a hand that was scarcely legible, saying that she was ill, but begging Bertha not to be alarmed as she hoped soon to be better. Bertha was not alarmed, but thought it very strange that her mother

should have written such a very careless, scrawled note.

Alas! Mrs. Maxwell had hardly strength to write at all. She was very violently attacked with fever, and was unwilling Bertha should be exposed to it by coming to see her.

Another week passed, and Bertha, who was very much occupied in preparing for an exhibition at the end of the term, scarcely thought of her mother's illness.

She went the next Saturday to the hotel, wishing much to see her mother, because she must have a new dress for the exhibition, in which she was to play a conspicuous part.

Instead of finding her mother at the Lamar-tine House, she met Mr. Hamden, the man with whom Mrs. Maxwell boarded; he had come in a wagon to take her to her mother.

Bertha was now exceedingly alarmed; she begged the man to take her immediately, and she would send an excuse afterwards to Mrs. Hoppington.

He placed her in the wagon, and drove as rapidly as possible till he reached his own house.

But alas! when Bertha arrived Mrs. Maxwell

was wandering, and she did not know the idolized child who stood by her bed-side.

Poor Bertha! She cried, "Mamma, mamma! it is your own darling! Don't you see me?"

Then the thought of her sudden departure without Mrs. Hoppington's knowledge, and as that lady supposed Mrs. Maxwell was a lodger at the Lamartine House, how was she to undeceive her?

"Oh what shall I do? What shall I do?" she exclaimed, again and again.

"Haven't you some friend to send for?" inquired Mrs. Hamden.

"No, I cannot think of one; but I must send word to Mrs. Hoppington that 'ma was taken suddenly ill in the country, and I was obliged to go to her."

"Not suddenly; the poor lady has been ailing for some time, though she was careful not to let you know it."

"Then do send word that 'ma is in the country very sick, and I am with her."

Mrs. Hamden promised to do so, but before she succeeded there had been great alarm at Mrs. Hoppington's, and thousands of wild con-

jectures as to what had become of Bertha. Their exhibition would be spoiled without the Beauty!

Mrs. Maxwell, in the ravings of fever, called for William, and implored him to come to her.

When Bertha attempted to speak to her she would say, "Go away! Go away! I don't know you. You trouble me. Keep out of my sight."

Every hour the poor lady grew worse; the physician said there was no hope of her recovery.

The very next day after Bertha arrived, Mrs. Maxwell died, without having recognized for a moment her darling child.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SUDDEN CHANGE OF SCENE.

It is a splendid library. Books on rich cases of oak. Marble statues on pedestals. Busts of the wise and good give an air of dignity and repose to the apartment. A bronze chandelier is suspended over a richly carved oak table, covered with green cloth; the gas light falls on three young ladies seated at the table with books before them, over which they studiously bend their heads.

Two years and some months have produced a change in the appearance of those three—Esther and Louisa Perrit, and their friend Margaret Gracy.

All have grown taller. Esther, a slender, graceful girl, has entered her seventeenth year. Louisa is nearly as tall as her sister. Patsy is

neither tall nor graceful, and none of them would be called superlatively beautiful, and yet one might seek among thousands and not find faces more expressive and interesting than those three.

There is sweet pensiveness in Esther's countenance, and deep thoughtfulness in her shaded eyes, "Wells of thought, in which the star of truth is shining," somebody once called those eyes.

Wells sometimes reflect the stars, and truth is said to be hid in a well—doubtless he who paid the compliment saw the heavenly soul beaming through those eyes.

Louisa's face is as arch and smiling as formerly; but more intellectual and more pleasing. Her vivacity is not subdued, but her temper is—at least, it is under tolerably good control: now and then it breaks loose, and has the mastery over her for a brief space.

Patsy is plump and rosy—but what a bright, sparkling countenance! Where could one find a happier face?

"Have you learned your lesson already, Patsy? I see you have laid aside Whately and taken up Scott," remarked Louisa.

"Yes; I have learned my rhetoric lesson perfectly and now am indulging myself in a few pages of the 'Lady of the Lake.'"

"So you do really enjoy poetry," said Esther, looking up playfully, from the book she was studying.

"Indeed I do, Esther; thanks to you."

"And thanks to you, Patsy; I have overcome the mountains of difficulty in Day's Algebra."

And how came Patsy in that splendid library? Mr. Perrit invited her to pass the winter in his family, and go to school with his daughters. Meantime, Mrs. Gracy, having left the care of her house to a farmer and his wife, who occupy it for the winter, has gone to Ivy Cottage to be with Miss Nancy.

A knock at the library door.

"Come in."

A waiter enters: "Miss Perrit, there is a gentleman in the parlor who wishes to see you and Miss Louisa."

"Did he not send up his name?"

"No, Miss."

"Esther and Louisa wondering much who

the gentleman could be, followed to the parlor. A tall, young gentleman, with dark hair and dark whiskers, bowed politely as they entered, and simply bade them "Good evening."

"My father and mother are not at home," said Esther, thinking the stranger must have called to see them.

"Violetta and Rosamia have forgotten the Damon of Castalia."

"Hamilton Gracy! St. George and the Dragon!" exclaimed Louisa, recalling at once the mad-dog scene and Patsy's comparison.

"The very same," he replied laughing, "or if you please, the respectable scare-crow."

"I'll run and call Patsy," said Louisa, scampering out of the room.

"Patsy! Is my sister here, Miss Perrit?"

"She is; did you not know it?"

"I did not; I arrived in the steamer from Europe to-day, and have not heard from my mother and sister for a long time. I am half afraid to ask for my mother."

"She is well—but here comes Patsy."

"Do you know this person?" said Louisa; "He claims to be an old acquaintance."

Patsy looked doubtfully at her brother for a moment, then ran to him, seized his arm, and burst into tears and shrieks of joy. He led her to a sofa, and hastily brushed the tears from his own eyes.

“Now tell us how you are, and where you came from, and how you happened to be here,” said Patsy.

“I was at Göttingen when you heard from me; that is, if you received my last letter.”

“We did; and despaired of seeing you soon, you were then so charmed with that German University.”

“After travelling over Europe and exploring Egypt, I went with my friend and pupil, for he was both to me, to Göttingen, where we passed a year. I then thought it was better for us to return home, lest we should become too Germanized for good and true American citizens. We passed a short time in England and Scotland on our return; and here I am, thank God, once more in my own beloved country. My mother, Miss Perrit says, is well. I shall go directly to Sylvania.”

“What, to-morrow!” exclaimed Patsy.

“Yes; to-morrow. Will you go with me?”

“I cannot leave school—I am going on with my studies here, to fit myself for a teacher.”

“Indeed! You are a brave girl.”

Esther and Louisa soon withdrew, leaving the happy brother and sister to enjoy a tête-à-tête.

CHAPTER XIX.

IVY COTTAGE FIRESIDE.

THAT same evening, it was dark and stormy in the country. Miss Nancy and her friend, Mrs. Gracy, were seated before a blazing wood fire at Ivy Cottage. A small, round table was between them—on which were two candles (of Miss Nancy's own making) in bright brass candlesticks.

Miss Nancy was knitting "a tidy" for an arm chair, Mrs. Gracy reading aloud from Dwight's "Germany." Of course Germany has great attractions for her while her only son resides there, and Miss Nancy sympathizes with her in all her cares and interests.

A large Maltese cat stretches its full length on the rug before the fire, looking the very picture of a petted favorite.

“Stop a moment; I thought I heard a knock at the front door,” said Miss Nancy.

A single faint, timid rap was heard.

“Who can it be, this stormy night?” said Mrs. Gracy, snatching up the candle and going to the door. The instant she opened it a gust blew out the light, but not before a glance had shown her that it was a woman.

“Come in out of the storm, whoever you are,” she exclaimed, holding the door wide open.

Slowly the person stepped in, and Mrs. Gracy closed the door.

“Wipe your feet on the mat, and then come this way,” Mrs. Gracy continued, as she opened the door of the little parlor.

The stranger remained standing in the small entry without speaking a word.

Mrs. Gracy relighted the candle and returned to the entry. Miss Nancy followed.

A slight, stooping figure, dressed in black, was leaning on the post at the foot of the staircase; the face was completely hidden by a bonnet. On her arm was a small, black travelling bag.

“Who, and what are you?” demanded Miss Nancy, somewhat abruptly.

A sob, almost a groan, was the only reply.

"Come in by the fire," said Miss Nancy; "you must be almost frozen."

Mrs. Gracy took the stranger by the arm, led her in almost by force, and seated her on a chair, near the fire.

She continued to weep aloud.

"Your feet must be very cold," Mrs. Gracy said, as she observed a pair of small, thin shoes, much worn; "let me rub them."

As she took the shoes from the small, delicate feet, partially covered by silk stockings full of holes, she chafed them in her warm hands, and then shook her head, mournfully.

Miss Nancy meantime went to the kitchen and put the tea-kettle on to make a cup of hot tea.

"Take off your bonnet; it is too stormy for you to go farther to night," continued Mrs. Gracy.

"Oh! I can't take off my bonnet; I am not fit to be seen," sobbed out the stranger.

"Never mind that; it would be cruel to allow a dog to be out in such a night as this," thought kind Mrs. Gracy as she untied the black bonnet.

With some reluctance the stranger allowed the bonnet to be removed. Mrs. Gracy started as she saw a deathly pale young face, and a head from which the hair had all been shaven.

"It must be a lunatic," thought she, shuddering.

Miss Nancy now entered, and the same thought passed through her mind.

"You don't know me, Miss Nancy Perrit," whispered the stranger, trembling like a leaf in the autumn wind.

"No; poor young creature, I never saw you before."

"You have seen me at church—I am Bertha Maxwell."

"Bertha Maxwell! Beautiful Bertha!"

"They used to call me beautiful," she attempted to say, but the words died on her half-frozen lips and chattering teeth.

"Poor child! You shall have some hot tea soon, and then perhaps you will tell me how you happened to come here to me—to me." Miss Nancy repeated the last words with startling emphasis.

"I know I poisoned your parrot, and was

very rude to your nieces ; but I had nowhere else to go," said Bertha, bursting into violent weeping.

"*His* child coming to me? Mysterious Providence! In mourning, too! Can it be that *the woman* is dead?" said Miss Nancy to herself, as she left the room.

Soon she returned with a tray, on which were a smoking cup of tea, bread and butter, and boiled eggs.

Placing the tray on the small, round table, she moved it close to Bertha, and begged her to help herself.

The shivering girl swallowed the tea, but could not eat a morsel. The warmth was reviving.

"You dont know that my mother is dead, and perhaps my brother is dead too," said she, with a violent effort.

"We will not trouble you to tell us any more about your misfortunes to-night," said Mrs. Gracy, tenderly, her eyes overflowing with tears.

Miss Nancy, who never forgot what was needful for the comfort of the body, added, "No

indeed, we will not. Orpy shall make a fire in your room and warm your bed, and in the morning I hope you will feel a great deal better."

Miss Nancy not only showed Bertha to her room, but helped her to undress, and tucked the bed-covering in all around, as snug and closely as the upper crust of one of her apple pies.

The candles burnt out ; the clock warned them the lateness of the hour, and still Miss Nancy and Mrs. Gracy were sitting by the smouldering fire, talking of things past, present, and to come.

CHAPTER XX.

WHO COMES NOW ?

THE next morning Bertha felt unable to come down stairs, and Miss Nancy sent up her breakfast. Orpy set down the tray, stared at Bertha a moment, and then lifting up her hands and eyes, muttered, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Soon after Orpy left the room Mrs. Gracy went in and found Bertha earnestly regarding herself in a small looking-glass, which hung over the old-fashioned toilet-table.

The beautiful curls, once so ornamental, were gone, and the short, bristly covering which remained stood out "like quills upon the fretful porcupine;" her eyes were red and swollen, her complexion sallow and mottled—in short she was a complete fright.

She was repeating in a bitter tone the passage from Scripture which Orpy, half unconsciously, had dropped from her lips.—“Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

“What a horrid creature! Poor ’ma would not have known me;” and Bertha covered her face with her hands, and threw herself on the bed, weeping convulsively.

“Excuse me,” said Mrs. Gracy, whose presence Bertha had not before noticed; “I came to see if I could be of any service to you.”

“Nobody can do me any good. O, I am so miserable!”

“Poor child! don’t agitate yourself; you have been very ill.”

“I have; who told you so?”

“I judge so from your appearance; I hope you will soon be better.”

“I shall never be beautiful Bertha again.”

“Never mind that, if you recover your health. Where were you during your illness?”

“At Mr. Hamden’s. I have been dreadfully ill. ’Ma died, you know, of fever. I took it from her, and came near dying. I was very

sick a great many weeks. Those people were poor, plain folks, and I suppose did what they could for us. I don't think they meant to be hard with me, but they sold all ma's clothes and almost all mine, to pay the doctor, and for the funeral and nurses and medicine. Only think, Mrs. Gracy, I have now nothing in 'the world but the few things I brought with me."

Bertha seeming much exhausted, Mrs. Gracy begged her to keep quiet, but Miss Nancy now coming in, she continued, "How can you and Miss Nancy Perrit be so kind to me? I must tell you how I came here. I thought if I could only get to Linden Hall it would seem like home—for I was *so* home-sick. I begged Mr. Hamden to let me have just money enough to get here, and I would leave my dear little watch with him till I could pay him. He said we owed him more than the watch was worth already, but he would buy me decent mourning and give me money enough to travel to Linden Hall. He did so; but when I got here the money was all gone, for I came by the rail-road. Nobody spoke to me all the way. I walked to Linden Hall—cold and desolate it was. I

sat down on the front steps and cried a long while. I did not know anybody in this neighborhood. 'Ma never made acquaintances in the country. I remembered the two girls who stayed with Miss Nancy Perrit one summer, and thought how happy they always were,—and what a sweet, gentle way one of them had. I remembered, too, when I was a very little girl my father said to me, as we passed this house—he led me by the hand I remember, and he said, 'Miss Nancy Perrit lives here; she was once a very dear friend of mine.' I wonder how I ever could have forgotten it—somehow I did till I sat on those cold steps, and the dark, stormy night was coming; and then, when I thought of it, I said to myself, perhaps Miss Nancy will be kind to me for the sake of my father who has been so long dead and gone. I knew she could not for my own sake, for I poisoned her parrot. Oh dear! I have not a friend in the world."

The tears were chasing each other down Miss Nancy's face; she could not speak.

"I am sorry to make you feel so badly," added Bertha; "I will not talk to you any more now."

"Be quiet, then. We will leave you to rest yourself as long as you please," said Mrs. Gracy, tenderly.

"Oh, I must say how sorry I am that I was rude to Patsy Gracy, too; I was very haughty. I see it now."

"Patsy would most heartily forgive you."

Mrs. Gracy then went down stairs and found some lace to make Bertha a cap, to cover her frightful head, while Miss Nancy went to her own room and passed the rest of the morning alone.

At dinner-time Bertha still pleaded fatigue and weariness and begged to be allowed to stay in her room.

Miss Nancy was silent and thoughtful at dinner. She seemed to be revolving something in her mind, which at last shaped itself into expression: "Yes, yes; I must teach her to work, poor thing, that she may be able to support herself."

As this was rather thought aloud than addressed to Mrs. Gracy, she seemed not to notice it.

"I wonder what has become of the lad. Do you know, Mrs. Gracy?"

“Who? William Maxwell? I haven’t heard a word of him since he suddenly left college.”

“Then she is alone in the world—William’s daughter!—a poor, helpless, spoiled child!” And Miss Nancy again relapsed into silence.

Bertha was allowed to remain in her bedroom all day. It was the same room Esther and Louisa had occupied. There was the wardrobe, and there the pretty secretary and bookcase, with some of their books still standing on the shelves. Bertha looked them over with interest, and almost for the first time in her life found pleasure in reading.

Mrs. Gracy and Miss Nancy were again seated by the fire for one of their usual quiet evenings. Dwight’s Germany was spread open on the table. Miss Nancy, instead of knitting, had in hand a piece of white flannel, making up garments for somebody—she did not say for whom. Without, it was a clear, cold night; the stars were gleaming brightly in the dark sky. Within, too, it was cheery and bright; the fire sending its flickering flames up the wide chimney, and the candles (only when they wanted

snuffing) giving a pleasant light to the little parlor.

"Mercy! there's another rapping at the door!" exclaimed Miss Nancy, starting up.

There could be no mistake now. The old knocker was not lifted by a timid hand. Before Miss Nancy could reach the door, rap! rap! rap! it went again. Mrs. Gracy followed and stood just behind her as she cautiously opened the door.

"Who's there?" demanded Miss Nancy, as she caught a glimpse of a man full six feet tall.

"Is my mother here?" was the reply.

The question was answered by Mrs. Gracy springing forward and clasping the stranger to her heart. Oh, the unfathomable depth of a mother's love! Such joy as hers found no expression in words.

"Come in! come in! I suppose this must be the *boy* you have been talking about all winter," said Miss Nancy, holding the light to the young man's face as she walked backward to the parlor.

"Yes, this is my son Hamilton," she replied, proudly surveying him, from his broad, hand-

some forehead to his polished boot—from top to toe, from toe to top.

Miss Nancy under no circumstances forgot good cheer, and soon the little table, well filled with it, was placed before the traveler, who was ready enough to appreciate it. Hundreds of questions were to be asked and answered between mother and son, and Miss Nancy went to stay awhile with Bertha. Hamilton discussed his coffee and several other matters.

“I saw Patsy last evening. How well she is looking, and how her manners have softened. The elder Miss Perrit must have had a happy influence over her. Mother, you have not seen Miss Esther for a long time. She is perfectly lovely. I never saw a more beautiful countenance. She resembles the famous Dresden Madonna; my favorite among all Raphael’s Madonnas; yet she has more sweetness—a more angelic expression than any picture I have seen abroad.”

“Hamilton, I remember you raved in this way about Bertha Maxwell’s beauty. You called her angelic.”

“Did I? It was a boyish fancy. Hers was

a different kind of beauty—a wax-doll beauty—mere color and form ; but, by the way, is beautiful Bertha still at Linden Hall ?”

Mrs. Gracy was embarrassed, and seemed reluctant to reply.

“Is she dead ?” exclaimed Hamilton.

“No ; but her poor mother is dead. Bertha is here.”

“Here ! in this house ?”

“In this very house, my son.”

Mrs. Gracy drew tears from the eager listener as she related Bertha’s mournful story.

It was late that night when Hamilton Gracy went over the well-known road to his mother’s house, where he passed the night. As he lifted his eyes to the glittering stars which gemmed the heavens, he thanked the Almighty Creator for the kind care and love bestowed on one so humble and insignificant as himself.

The next day Bertha was intending to come down stairs ; but when she heard that Hamilton Gracy was there, she positively refused, and weeping, said, “He was my brother’s dear friend. Oh, ask him if he knows what has become of William Maxwell.”

Mrs. Gracy was obliged to confess that her son had not heard from his classmate since he left college.

"Oh, such a horrid fright as I am! I would not see Mr. Gracy for the world," exclaimed poor Bertha.

"I have brought you a cap, Miss Bertha," said Mrs. Gracy; "perhaps, as you have not had time since your recent illness to make any for yourself, you will do me the favor to wear it."

Mrs. Gracy was extremely polite and delicate in her manner towards the poor girl, much more so than she would have been to the beautiful Bertha of Linden Hall.

"I shall be glad to wear it," was the reply. "I asked Mrs. Hamden to buy me some caps, but she did not. I brought but few things with me. Where am I to go, Mrs. Gracy?"

"I don't know. Can you not go back to Mrs. Hoppington as an assistant teacher?"

"Oh, no, indeed. She did not come to see me, and was very angry with poor ma. When Mrs. Hamden went there for my things she asked her that very question. She laughed, and said I could teach nothing but dancing.

Mrs. Hamden told me I must work for a living as she does. I don't know how to do one useful thing. It would kill me to wash and iron, or to work out doors, like Patsy."

"You must get quite well before you think of these matters, my poor child," said Mrs. Gracy, taking one of Bertha's thin, delicate hands, and thinking how utterly impossible it would be for the feeble girl yet to make any exertion, in her unselfishness forgetting that her own hands had once been equally delicate.

Hamilton Gracy remained at home only one day ; a part of it he passed in solitary musing by the grotto and the brook-side, and there formed resolutions which he religiously kept in after years.

His liberal allowance to his mother and sister had enabled them to transform the ugly red house to a neat white one, with honeysuckles, roses, and woodbines climbing about it. The old red gate had been displaced by a handsome white one, with stone posts, over which ivy was growing luxuriantly, transplanted from the parent vine at Ivy Cottage. The farm, too, was in fine order.

Hamilton dined at Miss Nancy's, but Bertha did not come down stairs. Little thought she, when she took a peep at him between the dimity curtains of her window, as he was coming through the gate, what a shock, a shudder of horror, she gave him. It was but a glance, yet it revealed that emaciated visage, with the eyes starting from the head, the lips, once so red and full, thin and blue, the sallow cheeks, the shaven head.

"And what are your plans for the future, my son?" asked Mrs. Gracy.

Hamilton told her that the gentleman whose son he had traveled with had made him a generous offer to study law with him, and at the same time to continue his son's tutor. He would thus be able to maintain himself. He only wanted his mother's approval.

Mrs. Gracy very naturally thought her son had sufficient talent to honor that profession, and readily approved of the plan. Although his visit was short, she was obliged to consent to his immediate return to the city, where he was to enter at once the lawyer's office.

When taking leave of his mother, he slipped

a gold piece into her hand, and whispered, "Poor Bertha!"

The next evening, when Hamilton Gracy related Bertha's sad story at Mr. Perrit's, various were the emotions of the little circle.

When Louisa learned that Bertha had lost all her beauty, the first thought was, "I am glad of it!" The instantaneous one that followed was, "Oh, how wicked I am! Poor unfortunate girl!"

Mr. and Mrs. Perrit, with their usual benevolence, began to devise ways and means for her comfort. Mr. Perrit said, "It will be a good thing for sister Nancy to have her sympathy and kindness called forth in Bertha's behalf."

Esther covered her face and wept, without uttering a word.

Patsy said, "What a pity the poor child was never taught to work. How can she maintain herself?" Patsy had been taught that every person should, if need came, "earn their own living."

* * * * *

"How can she maintain herself?" was the question asked at Ivy Cottage by Mrs. Gracy.

"We will teach her," was Miss Nancy's cheerful reply.

Yet, day after day, Bertha sat cuddled up in an arm-chair by the fireside, and did nothing. Under the care of two such excellent nurses she rapidly recovered her health.

"Here is some plain sewing for you," said Mrs. Gracy one morning to Bertha, after she had been a full month at Ivy Cottage.

"I cannot do plain sewing; I don't know how," said she.

"But I can teach you."

"Poor ma always did everything for me. It will spoil my fingers to sew;" and she began to weep.

"But, Bertha, you know you must now learn to do many things for yourself. It may seem hard at first; but soon you will find more pleasure in being occupied than in idleness."

"I wish I had a piano here."

"A piano!" exclaimed Mrs. Gracy, almost hopeless. "You must learn something besides accomplishments."

"I mean to teach dancing; Mrs. Hoppington said I could."

"But *who* will you teach here? Surely not Miss Nancy, not me, nor Orpy," replied Mrs. Gracy, laughing at the ridiculous idea.

"I don't know why you laugh. Every lady admired my dancing; and if my face is changed, my figure and feet are not."

Mrs. Gracy was puzzled. Is there no possibility of vanity's dying out?

"It would be very disagreeable for you to appear among the people of the village under present circumstances. Have you any acquaintance with them?"

"No; I never was allowed to speak to the country people. Now it would be mortifying. I suppose I must give up that notion. But, indeed, I shall prick my fingers dreadfully with that coarse work."

"I hope not. It is only hemming. I will turn down and baste the hem for you."

Bertha was awkward, but Mrs. Gracy was patient. True, there were little dots of blood from the delicate fingers all along the hem, and the delicate fingers smarted a little; but Bertha was pleased to see what she had accomplished, and when Mrs. Gracy told her she had better

lay aside her work, she said, "Not till I show it to Miss Nancy."

That good lady came in, bringing a checked apron, one that belonged to Esther. She praised the first effort at hemming. "Now," said she, "put on this apron, Bertha; I am going to teach you to make pies, as I did my nieces."

"Oh, now, Miss Nancy, you surely are not going to take me to the kitchen. I am afraid of old Orpy."

"Orpy is the kindest of human beings; she would not hurt a fly."

"Oh, dear! I don't know what I have got to come to next!"

"I do," said Miss Nancy, good humoredly. "When you have learned to make pies, I will teach you to make bread. I intend taking you through a regular course of domestic learning."

Poor Bertha was ready to faint from the heat and the smoke of the kitchen; and her unskilfulness in paring apples quite exceeded that of Miss Nancy's former pupils. Old Orpy *whispered* loudly in Miss Nancy's ear, "Do take the poor little *crittur* out of the kitchen."

Miss Nancy did as Orpy requested.

“The bird that we nurse is the bird that we love.”

So kind had been Miss Nancy and Mrs. Gracy to the unfortunate Bertha, that they were becoming devotedly attached to her, in spite of her faults. The prospect of her being able to maintain herself was very doubtful. It was quite certain that she was unfit for hard work. Too tender early nurture had rendered her a fragile thing, no more able to encounter the storms of life than the drooping fucia of the greenhouse would be to encounter the wintry blasts which now beat harmlessly against its warm shelter.

* * * * *

LETTER FROM PATSY GRACY.

“*March* 20, 18—.

“DEAR MOTHER :

“I begin already to count the days which must pass before I shall be with you. Much as I have enjoyed the winter, my heart bounds at the prospect of being once more in my own humble home.

“I am right glad to hear that you and Miss

Nancy continue to be deeply interested in Bertha Maxwell. Mrs. Perrit says Miss Nancy only wanted an occasion to open up the rich and sweet fountain of kindness in her generous heart. Esther and Louisa unsealed the fountain which is now flowing forth so abundantly. I don't think those were her exact words, but it was the idea.

"I have something to tell you, dear mother, which will, I trust, give you pleasure. I am sure it has made me jump for joy. Mr. Perrit has found two pupils for me—two nice little girls, whose mother is an invalid, and whom I am to take home with me and *educate*, with your permission and assistance. Now will you be a mother to them, too—a dear, good mother, as you are to me? You know how anxious I am to be independent, because—yes, mother, we must think of these matters—because I want you to be well provided for when you are older, and that you may not be obliged to work so hard now.

"I have found myself able to keep a high standing in my classes at school, thanks to you and Hamilton for your thorough elementary in-

struction, and hope it is not presumption for me to attempt teaching.

“Hamilton must not be taxed for us. It will be as much as he can do to support himself while he is obtaining his profession. Then, you know, he must have a law library. Perhaps, if I am successful, I may be able to make him a present of Blackstone’s Commentaries and some other law books. Wouldn’t that be delightful!

“Then I have another plan. Bertha must receive a good education. I can assist her. If she stays with Miss Nancy she can recite to me every day. What do you say to that, my dear, good mother? and what says generous Miss Nancy? Poor petted Bertha! Helpless orphan! We must do all we can for her till she is able to help herself. Tell her not to be discouraged. There is One above who ‘tempers the blast to the shorn lamb.’

“The Perrits—the noble Perrits, one and all, send love to the tenants of Ivy Cottage.

“Devotedly your daughter,

“PATSY.

“P. S.—We see Hamilton quite frequently.

He is a great favorite here, I assure you. I hope our farmer takes good care of Mincey."

Mrs. Gracy read the letter to Miss Nancy and Bertha.

"And that is the farm-girl whom I used to despise!" exclaimed the latter. "How can she be so generous to me?" After musing awhile, Bertha asked Mrs. Gracy how Patsy, who was only a little older than herself, could be her teacher.

"Because for years she has been preparing herself for the employment," answered Mrs. Gracy. "Many a time has she stood at the ironing-table with a book on the corner of it, studying her lesson while she was ironing. You have seen her sitting by the road-side with her book in hand, while our cow was feeding."

"That I have, again and again, and I wondered what funny story-books they were that charmed her so much that she did not notice me at all. Mrs. Gracy, it seems to me the strangest thing in the world that you should be so much more kind to me now than you were then."

Mrs. Gracy might have told Bertha that the reason was because she more needed kindness now than she did then ; but she simply said, "We are all glad if we can do you any good."

Alas ! the sun of prosperity had withered and shrivelled the heart of Bertha Maxwell, and it was still too contracted to comprehend the length, and breadth, and depth of Christian charity.

CHAPTER XXI.

DELICATE KINDNESS.

BERTHA had now been some months at ivy Cottage, and yet had never been off the grounds. They urged her to go to church. She would not for the world, she said, have those country folks make fun of her. "You stayed home from church yourself for ever so many years," said she to Miss Nancy.

"Sorry am I that such is the fact. Those were lost years to me. But you should follow good examples, and not bad ones like mine," was the humble reply.

These words were scarcely uttered when a carriage drove up to the door, and out of it sprang Hamilton Gracy, who then handed out Esther, Louisa, and Patsy.

Bertha fled to her room and locked herself in. The new comers were welcomed at the gate by

a *feu-de-joie* of kisses from Miss Nancy and Mrs. Gracy. The little party had just left Mr. and Mrs. Perrit, who, after dropping them at the Sylvania station, continued their route westward. Mrs. Gracy went home with her son and daughter.

In spite of the urgent entreaties of Miss Nancy, Bertha would not leave her room. The evening was passed in pleasant chat by the party below. The misses were surprised to find how tenderly and affectionately their aunt felt towards her unfortunate guest. Louisa still found it difficult to repress a wicked joy that Bertha was no longer beautiful. Esther, full of sympathy and pity, seemed entirely to have forgotten the grievances they had suffered during their former visit.

The next morning Miss Nancy sent up Bertha's breakfast, instead of following Louisa's advice, half in jest, and half in naughty earnest: "Starve her out." Bertha refused to admit Orpy with the well filled tray, though she had taken no supper.

Soon after breakfast Esther went and knocked gently at the door of Bertha's room.

No answer.

She knocked more loudly, with no better success; then, in a gentle voice she said, "It is I; Esther Perrit. Will Miss Maxwell please let me come in? I wish to tell her how deeply I am interested in her." The sweet voice of Esther was an "open sesame." Bertha unlocked the door and admitted her to the well-known apartment. The shutters were closed and the curtains down. They sat in darkness, but Esther's conversation was sunshine to the overshadowed soul of Bertha; she drew her on to relate her trials, and wept with the unfortunate and erring girl.

"I have lost everything. Is n't it a shame?" said Bertha, as she ended her painful story. "I have lost my beauty, and my money, and my home, and my mother, and I never shall be happy again as long as I live. I wish I could die."

"Oh Bertha, Bertha! don't say that;—think what a mercy it is that your life was spared, that you might have better feelings towards God, your Maker, before you go into his presence in another world and be judged according to the works done in the body."

“Why I never have done anything very bad that I should be punished so severely in this world. To be sure I was proud, but I had a great deal to be proud of, and I was rude to you and your sister. I coaxed Groschen, my German maid, to poison Miss Nancy’s parrot, because she said ‘Hold your tongue’ to me. We gave the creature arsenic one day when she was sitting on the fence yonder. I am sorry for that, because Miss Nancy is very kind to me now.”

“It is a good beginning, Bertha; we ought to be sorry for all the wrong we have done to our fellow-creatures. Can we help feeling sorry, too, when we think how we have treated our best Friend? God gave you beauty and many other things—perhaps you never loved Him nor thanked Him for those gifts, and yet you are very angry, and think it hard because He takes them away from you. Bertha, your Heavenly Father may be trying a different course to bring you to Him. You know when the Prodigal Son, in the beautiful parable, had spent all his living and began to be in want, he remembered his father’s house and resolved to go to him and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and

before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants.' Now, you know his father met him while he was yet a great way off; he was on his return, however, with love in his heart towards that kind father. So we must all return to our Heavenly Father, and He will forgive our sins, and make us his dear children through Jesus Christ, and give us a better inheritance than beauty or wealth. There is no perfect happiness in this world, but there is 'pleasantness' and there is 'peace' for those who walk in 'wisdom's ways,' and after death perfect happiness through eternity. But I am afraid I have wearied you, Bertha; I will bid you good morning."

"No, you have not; tell Miss Nancy I will come down to dinner."

When the clock struck twelve, Bertha slowly descended the stairs, but when she reached the door of the little parlor she stood irresolute, with her hand on the lock. She heard Esther's sweet voice, and it wooed her onward.

As soon as Louisa saw her, all malicious, unkind feeling passed away like chaff before the wind. Bertha had lost her uncommon beauty;

but her hair was now grown longer, her complexion was less sallow, and she was much less emaciated. She was pale, and her eyes swollen and red with weeping. It was not the change in appearance that touched the generous heart of Louisa. It was the shyness—the painful consciousness of wrong-doing which Bertha exhibited—which quite subdued Louisa; she went forward to meet her, held out her hand cordially and led her to a seat at table beside her, but Louisa could not speak a word. Perhaps the large drops that chased each other over her cheeks were a most acceptable expression of sympathy.

What made Miss Nancy *nudge* her knuckles into her own eyes so indignantly? She had no reason to be ashamed of those tears that would come in spite of herself.

It would have been an awkward and painful meal throughout, but for Esther. She talked with Miss Nancy about Patsy's plans. The two pupils were to arrive in a few days. There was to be a room fitted up for the little school. Patsy hoped for a third pupil. "Margaret Gracy," said she, "was the first scholar in her

classes at school. She has besides been taking lessons in music all winter and has made wonderful progress, so that she will be able to teach the little girls, who are beginners. Papa has given her a piano, and Bertha can practice if she wishes to keep up her music."

Bertha's eyes brightened and her face flushed with pleasure. Such delicate consideration for her was more than she could possibly understand, and it was long, long before she fully appreciated all their kindness.

CHAPTER XXII.

A. LETTER TO THE DEAD.

THE two little pupils arrived, and the day came for opening Patsy's school.

One expected scholar was very reluctant to make her appearance. Bertha had not yet been beyond Miss Nancy's grounds, though she had of late frequently seen Patsy at Ivy Cottage.

"Come Bertha, Louisa and I will walk with you this morning," said Esther, handing her a neat white sun-bonnet, the making of which had employed many an hour in Esther's room ; "please wear this bonnet, because it is just like Louisa's and mine."

"I am afraid we shall meet Hamilton Gracy."

"He has returned to the city

"But we shall meet a great many other people."

"They will do us no harm. It is a charming morning, and the walk to Mrs. Gracy's a delightful one."

"But, Miss Perrit, are you not afraid of mad dogs?"

Esther shuddered, but replied, "It is not the season for mad dogs."

"Here are your books, Bertha; I will put them in your dinner-basket," said Louisa, cutting short the deliberation by walking off with the basket on her arm.

"Dinner-basket!" exclaimed Bertha, looking at the well-filled basket with as much horror as a fashionable dandy would at a huge market-basket, if requested to carry it home. "Dinner basket! Am I expected to carry my dinner?"

"You may call it a lunch if you please, Bertha," said Miss Nancy; "you know, my dear, you are to stay all day on account of your music and French, so at noon you will need some refreshment, and if you choose, ask Patsy to join you; or perhaps you will prefer going to Mrs. Gracy's table; if so, the pie (for it is a pretty large one), and other things can go on her table

without looking oddly. Do just as you please, darling."

As Mrs. Gracy predicted, Miss Nancy was in danger of over-indulgence to her present pet.

"Louisa is running away from us, we must walk fast to come up with her."

As soon as they started, Louisa skipped back to them and went on chatting in her gayest mood, in spite of the big dinner-basket which she now and then changed from one arm to the other.

When they arrived, there sat Patsy (beg pardon! Miss Gracy!) in an arm chair, as grave and as dignified as the President of a College on Commencement Day. Her two young pupils were seated at their desks. Patsy motioned Bertha to take her seat at another desk, and then with a wave of the hand to Esther and Louisa, unceremoniously dismissed them.

The fact was, she saw a mischievous twinkle in Louisa's eye, and was afraid her own gravity would be disturbed.

The sisters wandered homeward by the grotto and the brook, calling up memories of the past at every step. They were not as romantic and

sentimental as formerly, but they had keener appreciation, and more intense love of the beautiful. In the grotto they could not stand upright, but they sat on the old rustic bench, and chatted a full hour.

“Suppose we go now to the Post Office, we ought by this time to have letters from papa and mamma,” said Louisa.

“A bright thought!” exclaimed Esther, starting up suddenly, and thumping her head against the rock-roof hard enough to knock all bright thoughts out for the next minute.

At the Post Office they found letters for themselves, and then the Post-master said, “Here is a letter for Mrs. Maxwell, who used to live at Linden Hall. I understand the lady is dead. It is a foreign letter, that has been long on the way.”

“Her daughter is with my aunt, Miss Nancy Perrit. Shall I take the letter to her?”

“Yes; if you will pay the postage.”

“Certainly.”

Many were the conjectures formed about that letter as they wended their way to Ivy Cottage. They wished to go immediately and carry it to

Bertha, but Miss Nancy thought it better to wait for her return in the afternoon.

Mrs. Gracy walked home from school with Bertha, to whom the day had been the most pleasant she had passed in a long time.

Miss Nancy took Mrs. Gracy aside, and telling her of the letter, asked her to hand it to Bertha.

Mrs. Gracy followed Bertha to her own room, and there broke it to her as gently as possible that the letter she held in her hand was addressed to her deceased mother. Bertha held it in her hand, turning it this way and that, studying the various postmarks, and then asked, in a mournful tone, what she should do with it.

“You can open and read it, if you please.”

“’Ma never allowed me to open her letters.”

“It may relate to business of importance.”

“Please call Miss Nancy.”

Mrs. Gracy did so.

“O, Miss Nancy, only think! this letter ought to have come to my poor ’ma, who is now in—in the grave. I am afraid to open it—please just see who it comes from.”

Miss Nancy shuddered at the thought of open-

ing one of Mrs. Maxwell's letters, but not liking to refuse, with trembling hands she broke the seal, and glancing her eye at the closing page, read aloud, "William Maxwell," and placed the letter on Bertha's lap.

"From my brother! It cannot be. Do read it. I can't see one word."

"Wait awhile till you are more composed. We will leave you to take your own time," said Mrs. Gracy, as they left the room.

THE LETTER.

"CANTON, *June 14, 18—.*

"MY DEAR MOTHER:

"I have written to you several times since I left home, but my letters may not have reached you, as I have not received any in return.

"After leaving Linden Hall, I made my way to New York as rapidly as possible, hoping to find there my friend Hamilton Gracy, who, I knew, was about to sail for Europe. He had sailed the very day before. I had been accustomed to consult him and to rely upon his superior judgment. Now, I was alone in a strange city, and without a dollar in my purse. I took

up a newspaper and saw an advertisement—
'Hands wanted on board ship Columbus, Capt. Micker, up for Canton,' &c. &c.

"Not knowing what to do with myself, I went on board the Columbus and engaged myself as a sailor before the mast. I, a fresh-water lubber, who had never before been on board any craft larger than a boat on Honey-pot Brook! We had a stormy passage. Of course I suffered severely from sea-sickness and the hardships incident to a sailor's life. We were seven months on the passage.

"For some reason, which I cannot explain, I gained the good-will of Captain Micker and his first mate. Finding that I was reduced in health and strength, and was really unable to do duty on deck, the Captain, who had no clerk, took me into his cabin to act in that capacity. Before we reached Macao he was seized with dangerous illness. I was his nurse. Through the mercy of God he recovered. During his convalescence I frequently read to him from the Bible and other good books, with which our ship had been supplied by the New York Marine Bible Society. He never to my knowledge

has used profane language since (unfortunately he had been terribly addicted to swearing); and he has given up 'grog' entirely. I do hope he is a Christian man. 'Works' seem to have followed fast after 'Faith.'

"He has since treated me like a brother. Being well acquainted with merchants at Canton, he inquired among them for a clerkship for a 'liberally educated young man.' He found a very lucrative position for me, which I still occupy.

"And now, my dear mother, though it was a severe trial for me to leave home, I trust God meant it for good. I shall now be able to do much more for you and Bertha than I could have done in a long time had I completed my college course. You wished my pretty sister to enjoy better advantages for her education than she could have at Linden Hall. I hope you have been able to afford them to her. It is highly important that she should be *thoroughly* educated. Such are the vicissitudes of life, that every person in our country should be prepared as far as possible to meet them.

"I herewith send you a draft on 'Horner,

Milburn & Co.,' of New York, for one hundred dollars, which they will cash at sight. You perceive that it is payable 'to bearer,' so that you have only to send it by mail. This is my first present to Bertha. I hope others will soon follow. Address the letters you write to me to the care of the same house, and they will forward them to me.

"I have thought of many things which I did at home which I ought not to have done, and many others which I left undone. I am deeply sorry for all the sins and follies of my childhood and youth. I beg you will forgive me, dear mother, for any wrongs I may have done to you in times past.

"Give my best love to dear Bertha. Tell her to study faithfully, and to learn besides, to be a domestic, useful woman—not a fine lady. Life is a stern, sober reality, my dear mother, but I hope, through God's assistance, to battle it through manfully. The flowers which lay in my morning path were crushed before noon, yet their perfume lingers in memory.

"Give my best love to my pretty Bertha, and beg her to write to me. I am extremely anx-

ious to hear from you. Alas! how many things may have happened to you since I left home. God bless and protect you from harm. Farewell.

“Your only son,

“WILLIAM MAXWELL.”

About an hour after Mrs. Gracy and Miss Nancy had left Bertha to read her letter, they returned, and found she had, childlike, cried herself to sleep. Their entrance awoke her.

“Was it a dream? Was it a dream?” she exclaimed, on waking. “O no; here is the blessed letter. Now, now I can have my dear little watch back again! Read it aloud, Mrs. Gracy.”

Mrs. Gracy’s eyes were dim with tears, and her voice faltered; but she read it all through. Miss Nancy immediately after left the room.

Could it be that Bertha’s first thought was of her watch? Ah! bad habits of thought and feeling are iron-rust stains on the soul. By sharp and bitter means must they be removed, or they will eat in to its very core.

“Tell me, Mrs. Gracy, how I can get the

money my brother sends me? It was kind in Bill to think of me," added Bertha.

"There will be no difficulty about obtaining the money," said Mrs. Gracy, coldly.

"I shouldn't wonder, now, with your singular notions, if you objected to my sending my own money for my beloved watch. It is such a dear little watch, with a blue enamelled back."

"Your generous brother's money was no doubt hardly earned, and ought to be judiciously spent."

"Well, I can have the watch for eighty dollars, and besides can pay Miss Gracy for my schooling, if you wish."

"That is too unkind. Now, Bertha, I am really angry with you. I can stay no longer;" and Mrs. Gracy hastily left the room.

She was too generous to tell Miss Nancy of this indelicate and cruel speech, but she did tell her about the watch, and Esther and Louisa were present. There was a general exclamation of astonishment. But tea was ready, and no more at that time was said about it. Bertha remained perfectly silent at the table, quite shamefaced.

After tea she called Miss Nancy aside, and had a conversation with her, the result of which Miss Nancy soon after communicated to the little circle.

“Of her own accord, she came to me and thanked me for all I have done for her, and offered me half the money she is to receive,” said the kind-hearted Miss Nancy, exultingly.

“You accepted it, of course; it is the first symptom of moral recovery Bertha has yet shown,” remarked Mrs. Gracy.

“I told the poor child I was much obliged to her, and I would take the matter into consideration. I will accept her offer, if you think best, but I shall send for the watch and keep it for her till some future time. You know I am a thrifty woman, and can well afford this small indulgence to myself.”

“You may indulge *yourself* as much as you please, but beware of indulging Bertha; she needs strict, steady watchfulness, and tight reins. You remember the fable of Sisyphus, and how the great stone he was rolling up hill pressed back upon him if he relaxed his efforts one moment. Just such will be your experi-

ence; you will find it up-hill work with Bertha."

Miss Nancy sighed, and was sorrowful.

"Take courage, dear aunt Nancy," said Esther, cheeringly, "I do believe the first impulse upward has been given to poor Bertha, and I trust God will give her strength to keep onward and upward, and true to the line."

CHAPTER XXIII.

GRAND EXPECTATIONS.

“MISS GRACY, please write a letter for me to my brother,” said Bertha, the next morning, as she sat at her school-desk, with a sheet of paper before her, biting the end of her pen.

“By no means ; you will write it better yourself.”

“I have tried and tried, and I can’t do it. Well, if you will not write for me, just read Bill’s letter, and tell me what to say.”

Patsy read the letter, and her tears fell like rain over the touching pages. It was, she acknowledged, very trying for Bertha to communicate the news of her mother’s sickness and death, and she would write that part of the letter for her. Difficult indeed did Patsy find the task thus imposed upon her ; she wrote and rewrote it,

and at last was quite dissatisfied with her effort, and sorry to be obliged to sign her name at the close.

Relieved from that part of the letter, Bertha wrote as follows :

“DEAR BILL :

“You will wonder who Margaret Gracy is, who wrote what goes before this. Don't you remember the farm-girl, who used to drive a cow, and hoe, and do all sorts of work? Well, she has got to be quite like a lady, and keeps school, and I go to her. She has only two scholars besides me, and she gives me my schooling for nothing. I live with Miss Nancy Perrit. She is very kind to me. You remember the queer old maid who lives in a log-house. *Them* two girls that you used to call fairies are now here on a visit. Esther is a very religious girl—Louisa not so much so. They both take a great deal of notice of me, though they are immensely rich, and I should be poor as poverty, if it was not for the money you sent. I am much obliged to you for it, and I hope you will be able to make a great deal more. The

worst news of all I have got to tell you is, I have lost my beauty. My hair had to be cut off, and it is growing out stiff and straight, and I don't think I shall ever get my true color again. But my form is the same, only rather better, and Miss Nancy says I look as well now as most folks. Who would have thought that Miss Nancy and these other people would be so kind to me when I came here sick, and with nothing but what I carried in my traveling bag! O Bill, I am really beginning almost to love Miss Nancy. Isn't it strange? I mean to study, because you want me to; and because it is lady-like to know something. I am glad you are so pious, because you won't get dissipated, and spend all your money. When do you expect to come home? I wish you was here now, for I do miss poor 'ma dreadfully; it makes me cry so to think of her, that I can't write another word, only that I am always your affectionate sister,

“BERTHA MAXWELL.”

This letter, and the draft, were sent to Horner, Minturn & Co., New York, and by return of

mail, Bertha received one hundred dollars. Half of it she handed to Miss Nancy, who whispered in her ear, "Darling, I will keep it for you."

Never having had fifty dollars in her possession before, Bertha felt quite rich, and on her way to school with Esther and Louisa, she talked of the handsome mourning she should buy, and formed bright plans for the future when her brother should come home, rich as Croesus.

"I do hope in all conscience," said she, "I shall never be obliged to earn my own living as Patsy does."

"Patsy is not obliged to do it ;—it is her free choice," replied Louisa with spirit ; "and you, Bertha Maxwell, ought to be the last person in the world to speak contemptuously of your generous benefactress."

"I don't mean to,—but O dear me ! I find it so hard to keep down my pride. I can't, somehow, remember that I don't live at Linden Hall, with a maid to wait on me, and everybody calling me Beautiful Bertha ; yet I have had enough to make me remember it."

Esther sighed as she thought how much more discipline the poor girl still needed.

The next Monday Mr. and Mrs. Perrit arrived at Ivy Cottage, and the day following left for home with their daughters.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NEWS FROM THE ANTIPODES.

MONTH after month passed away with very little change at Ivy Cottage and at Mrs. Gracy's, with one exception. Patsy's school had gradually increased, and now numbered ten—all day scholars but the first two pupils, who were still in the house with her. Bertha had become an industrious scholar, and was slowly improving in character.

It was nearly seven months since the reception of William Maxwell's letter, and none had been since received by Bertha. Day after day she went to the Post-office before going to school, and her heart sickened as every day she heard the same reply to her eager inquiry, "No letter."

At length it came, early in the month of May,

and with joy amounting to rapture, Bertha seized it and walked out of the office. She ran till she came to a retired place in a little grove, and seating herself under a tree, tore it open and read as follows :

“CANTON, *January* 21, 18—.

“Gone! Our poor mother gone, and you left alone, my dear Bertha! Delicately and tenderly as the information was conveyed, by your excellent friend Miss Gracy, it was a great shock to me.

“You, Bertha, our mother’s petted darling—who will take care of you? The Father of the fatherless, who has opened the heart of Miss Nancy Perrit to receive you so kindly to her own house. May He bless and reward her!

“I must write you a very short letter, my dear Bertha, for I am just recovering from severe illness, and can scarcely hold my pen. This climate does not agree with me, and I shall be obliged to return to my own country. For your sake I wish to return, and I trust it is on every account for the best.

“Through Messrs. Horner, Minturn & Co., I

send Miss Nancy Perrit a chest of tea, and a few articles for you, my dear sister. The ivory fan I wish you would present *in your own name*, to Miss Gracy. I am grieved not to be able to send you another draft; my long illness has drawn largely on my funds, and at present I have not a dollar to spare. Indeed I should have been troubled for money, had not an American gentleman kindly loaned me enough to render me comfortable. Do assure Miss Nancy Perrit that if my life and health are spared I will repay her, so far as pecuniary payment is concerned, and yet I shall remain her debtor for life. Kindness, such as hers and Miss Gracy's, calls forth the deepest gratitude; and thanks seem poor and mean when I endeavor to express them. Should I not be permitted to return home—but that is too sad a thought.

“What a privilege it is to you, dear Bertha, to be able to continue your education under such peculiarly favorable circumstances. Make the best use of your time at school, and at home assist good Miss Nancy in her domestic affairs. I hope you will become a discreet, useful woman. Above all, read your Bible, and pray to God to

impress its sacred truths on your heart. It has been a blessed consolation to me in a foreign land, far away from Christian society and the services of the Church, and above all during the long, lonely hours of a slow convalescence.

Please give my sincere regards and warmest thanks to Miss Nancy and all the Perrits, and my profound respects to Mrs. Gracy and her daughter.

“I am so much exhausted by the effort to write, that I have hardly strength left to subscribe myself

“Your loving brother,

“WILLIAM.”

Bertha covered her face with her hands, and sobbed aloud. For the first time in her life she breathed a heartfelt prayer;—few were the words, but the flame of devotion was kindled, and though but a feeble spark, it proved like “the morning light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

CHAPTER XXV.

UNDER AN UMBRELLA.

It was a warm day in the month of July. Bertha, at Miss Nancy's urgent entreaty, carried a large umbrella to shield her from the burning heat of the sun, as she walked to school. A small basket hung on her arm, and in one hand she held an open book in which she was diligently studying her lesson. As she thus walked slowly along, suddenly she almost stumbled over some one on the ground by the roadside, and stopped.

A young man, who might possibly have seen two and twenty summers, lay on the grass beneath a large elm tree, soundly asleep.

By his side was a small bundle, tied up in a white silk handkerchief. A stout stick lay by it. His coarse straw hat had fallen off, and his

dark hair fell over a face as bronzed as an Indian's; dark whiskers and moustache rendered his appearance still more dusky. His dress was worn and soiled, and yet had a certain air of respectability, "almost of gentility," thought Bertha, as she gazed wonderingly at the sleeping stranger.

"I am afraid this is not a safe place for a person to sleep," thought she. "Over the other side of the fence he would do better. It would be kind to tell him so." "Ahem! ahem!" said Bertha. He did not wake.

"I will put his bundle the other side of the fence, at any rate, for fear some rogue might steal it. I have a great mind to set my umbrella up so that it will shade his face, for the sun comes through this thin elm," said she to herself; and kneeling down beside him she endeavored so to place the umbrella as to afford him security from the scorching rays of the sun. Just as she had succeeded in placing it to her satisfaction, and while still on her knees bending over him, he suddenly awoke.

"Is this the good angel I have been dreaming of?" said he, gazing wistfully in her face.

“Oh, no, I am not a good angel. I never heard of angels carrying umbrellas. I was just trying to fix mine in such a way that you would not melt in the sun;” and Bertha started to her feet.

The young man did the same, and then said, “You are very kind, Miss. I was much fatigued with a long journey, and must have slept here for some hours.” Then looking round anxiously, he said, “I had a small parcel with me of great value; I am afraid some one has robbed me of it before you came along.”

“There now, you acknowledge it was careless of you to leave it exposed to the passers-by.”

“I do; but excessive fatigue overcame me. This is the crowning-point of my misfortunes.”

Bertha, with a merry laugh—that shrill ringing laugh—drew the bundle from the other side of the fence.

He started, and exclaimed, “There can be but one laugh like that. It must be Bertha’s.”

“Yes, I am Bertha Maxwell, and it is quite time I was at school; but I don’t know you, sir.”

“Not know your own brother! Then, indeed, I must be changed.”

“Brother!” exclaimed Bertha, still looking doubtfully at the dark stranger.

He threw his arms around her, and kissed her again and again, while she struggled to escape, crying, “I can’t believe it; no, I can’t believe it.”

“Yes, Bertha, I am your poor shipwrecked brother. Will you not own me?”

“I wonder I did not know your voice before,” said Bertha, tenderly. “I should, only it was so mournful, somehow—so grief-stricken.”

“Let us sit down under this tree awhile,” said William, “for although I have had a long nap, I am still very weary.”

They seated themselves together under the tree, and under the umbrella, too, Bertha saying, “I know Miss Gracy will excuse me for playing truant to-day, when she knows the reason. Bill, did you say you had been shipwrecked?”

“I did. If you received my last letter, you will remember that I was then recovering from a long and severe illness. After that I had another relapse, and my employers decided to send me home. I suffered much on the long

voyage during the first two months; after that I was better, and had almost recovered my health as we were drawing near our own dear country. We had just come in sight of the Neversink Hills of New Jersey, at the close of a hot, sultry day, when a violent gale suddenly sprang up. The ship was under full sail. Before there was time to take in sail, the masts were all carried away with one fell swoop, and our gallant ship was on her beam ends. The sailors succeeded in cutting loose the masts, and she righted; but six of the crew and two passengers had been swept overboard, and we never saw them again. The night came on dark as Egypt, and the storm raged more and more furious, driving our helpless vessel directly towards the coast.

“The captain said there was no help for us. We should soon be dashed either on the rocks or a sand bank. I took the most precious thing I had in my keeping, and secured it about my waist. The ship had sprung a leak, and was filling so fast I could not go down to the cabin to my trunk. At last the shock came. The vessel struck on a sand bar, and the captain en-

treated us to keep up courage till morning, when boats might be sent to our relief.

“Morning came, but no human beings were in sight. A low sandy beach extended along at no great distance from the ship, and all who could swim prepared to go on shore. I was among them; and with a fervent prayer to an Almighty Protector, threw myself from the sinking vessel into the sea, and swam some distance. But the waves were running high, and my strength failed. I was sinking, while the near shore was before my eyes, and almost within my grasp. As I sank in the water my whole past life came before me, and an agony indescribable, that I should no more see my poor, desolate sister. That was the last thought I remember, till I found myself in a shanty with two or three rough-looking men around me, rolling and tumbling me about, and punching and rubbing me with their hard hands. The operation was harsh, but successful. I had been washed ashore by a huge wave, and then had been seized by these wreckers, who by their efforts had rescued and recuscitated me.”

Here the narrator seemed quite exhausted.

Bertha, who had listened without once interrupting him, exclaimed, "Don't tell me a word more till you have refreshed yourself with some cold ham and biscuit."

Suiting the action to the word, she took a napkin from her dinner basket, spread it on her brother's lap, and laid on it some of Miss Nancy's famous biscuit, cold ham, and a saucer of freshly-gathered raspberries.

"I shall rob you of your dinner," said he, looking wishfully at it.

"And suppose you do; there are lots more where this came from. Miss Nancy doesn't eat much herself, but I really believe she thinks it a virtue in other people to relish her good fare."

Thus urged, William gladly partook of what was before him. Poor fellow, he had not eaten a morsel for twenty-four hours.

While he was thus refreshing himself, Bertha talked as fast as her tongue could wag about Miss Nancy and all the Perrits, Mrs. Gracy and Patsy, and their several sayings and doings. "Now tell me," she ended by saying—"now tell me how you reached this spot where I stumbled upon you?"

“Walked, Bertha; I walked all the way, for I had too little money to bear the expense of railroad traveling. I will not pain you by relating the particulars; I have had a rough journey, but, thank God, I have arrived and my precious parcel is safe.”

“And where were you going this morning?”

“To Mrs. Gracy’s.”

“Mrs. Gracy’s! That is just where I was going,” said Bertha, starting up. “Come, I will be the good angel who carries an umbrella.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN OVERWHELMING SURPRISE.

As Bertha and her brother entered the gate at Mrs. Gracy's, William said, "You must introduce me, Bertha; although Hamilton Gracy was my most intimate friend, I did not know the other members of the family."

"Miss Gracy is in school; I will take you to Mrs. Gracy's room, and leave you there." Mrs. Gracy's room that day was the kitchen, for the good lady was baking.

Bertha rushed in without knocking, and not waiting to know if her brother followed, exclaimed, "Here is my brother Bill; he looks as shabby as ever Hamilton did, and yet I was delighted to see him."

Mrs. Gracy, who was clearing the hot oven, stopped and leaned on the large kitchen shovel,

dumb with surprise at the sudden announcement. Bertha ran off to the school-room, and William entered the kitchen.

“William Maxwell! Is it possible!”

He bowed, saying, “Even my sister did not know me.”

Mrs. Gracy saw that he was fatigued, and handed him a chair, saying, “If you will excuse me, I will put my bread and pies in the oven, and then I will take you to a cooler room.”

William involuntarily turned his eyes from Mrs. Gracy while she put the light loaves and the nice cherry pies in the oven. It was perhaps polite so to do, yet Mrs. Gracy was not in the least ashamed of her occupation, and continued chatting about the weather and ordinary topics till the oven was filled, and then she led the way to her “sitting room,” as the best apartment in the house was called. Placing her guest in a comfortable rocking-chair, she took up her knitting and sat down near him.

“I hardly know how to begin the sad story I have to tell you, Madam,” said William.

“I perceive you are not well; you had been very ill when you wrote to Bertha.”

“It is not of myself I am about to speak; my sufferings and shipwreck I will relate to you another time.”

“Hamilton! Has anything happened to him?” inquired Mrs. Gracy, with alarm.

“I hope not. I have not seen him. You probably know that I resided for some time in Canton. While there I was able to render essential service to an American gentleman. We became well acquainted, and during my long illness he was kind to me. I recovered; but he, in the mysterious providence of God, was seized with a fever, which in a few days terminated fatally.”

Here William Maxwell paused, and seemed much embarrassed.

Mrs. Gracy regarded him with surprise and said, “you are fatiguing yourself; perhaps you had better omit the remainder of your story till another time.”

“By no means. It is difficult for me, Madam, to convey to you tidings so sad, and yet so mingled with cause for gratitude.”

‘Was the gentleman acquainted with—with

Mr. Gracy?" inquired she, in a voice almost inarticulate.

"The gentleman was——"

"Was acquainted with him since he left home," she hastily interrupted.

"The gentleman was himself——"

"My husband!" Mrs. Gracy grew deadly pale, but did not faint.

William untied the white silk handkerchief, saying, "Here is a letter from Mr. Gracy, and a casket containing some articles of value, and his last will."

Mrs. Gracy covered her face with her hands, and groaned aloud, while he placed them on her lap.

Gently saying, "God bless you," he left the house. There was an outer door to Patsy's school, opening into the front yard; William stepped to that door and knocked; it was opened by Patsy. Without waiting for an introduction she grasped his hand, and in her own frank manner gave him a cordial welcome. As he was thanking her, Bertha rushed by him with the umbrella and dinner-basket, crying, "Good-bye, Miss Gracy, I can't study to-day."

As the brother and sister approached Ivy Cottage, Bertha said, "Miss Nancy does not like to be taken by surprise; I will run round to the back door, and tell her you have come home."

Springing lightly over a rail-fence, she ran across a field to the house, while he walked onward till he came to Ivy Cottage, and there leaned wearily over the front fence. Miss Nancy, who was in the front-yard gathering chick-weed for her canaries, started up, and found herself face to face with the stranger.

"Gracious Heaven! Who *are* you?" exclaimed she.

"William Maxwell."

"Have you come from the spirit-world?"

"Not quite," replied he, supposing Miss Nancy had inferred from his last letter that his illness had proved fatal. "Not quite; but I have been on its borders."

"Oh, Miss Nancy!" cried Bertha, rushing out of the house, "I meant to prepare you to see my brother, and so I ran to the back door; I see he has introduced himself. Come in, both of you; the sun is broiling hot."

William waited for an invitation from Miss Nancy, who stood gazing wildly at him. Bertha put her arm around Miss Nancy's waist, and said playfully, "He mistook me for a good angel; I am afraid you mistake him for a bad one. He *is* rather dark-looking."

"Are you sure it is your brother?" eagerly inquired the still bewildered Miss Nancy.

"Why who else can he be? Come in."

"Yes; come in William Maxwell. It is twenty years and more since you came to me the last time; yet, you are heartily welcome.

"Now, Miss Nancy, you needn't pretend to be crazy; you are the oddest, kindest body in the world."

So saying Bertha drew Miss Nancy towards the house, and beckoned William to follow.

William had a long story to tell, but Miss Nancy, who had fully come to her senses, insisted that he should wait till after dinner.

Bertha, who seemed perfectly at home, showed him to a neat bed-room, and then insisted on brushing his coat, and left him to enjoy the luxury of plenty of cold water.

When she brought back the coat there were

with it a plain linen collar of her own, and two nice pocket handkerchiefs.

“Now Bill, put on the collar, and one of those handkerchiefs for a cravat, and you will look quite like a young clergyman.”

This simple act of kindness touched the brother tenderly, and though he that saw she was no longer beautiful, he admired her countenance, beaming with kindness, more than he ever had the proud Bertha.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE IVORY CASKET.

How different are the allotments of an all-wise Providence from the expectations of short-sighted man! Bertha Maxwell had expected her brother to return home "rich as Croesus," and he came penniless.

Mrs. Gracy, who had humbly reconciled herself to comparative poverty, suddenly became the possessor of a large fortune.

For many years she had believed Mr. Gracy to be no longer among the living, and never spoke of him even to her children.

Having nearly squandered the rich inheritance of his wife, he left her and wandered from place to place, at times in great poverty. Wishing to place himself as far as possible from all who had ever known him, he at last went to China. In Canton he found employment, at

first of a very humble kind, but at length various opportunities of making money offered, and Mr. Gracy resolved to regain what he had extravagantly spent, and restore it to his wife. To this purpose he devoted all his thoughts and actions, and as "extremes beget extremes," in his eager pursuit of wealth he became a complete miser. He dressed meanly and lived by himself, but his banking-house, or broker's office, was fitted up in an elegant, attractive style, and it was bruited abroad that he was immensely rich.

One night as he was going home from his office, and passing along a narrow street, he was suddenly attacked by two strong men, one of whom knocked him down and held him fast, while the other searched for the money he was supposed to have about him. Mr. Gracy struggled violently to release himself; the robber who held him down drew a long knife, and was just about to thrust it in his throat when he was arrested by a sudden and violent blow on the side of the head. He reeled for a moment, but soon found his feet, and both the robbers ran off at full speed.

Mr. Gracy sprang up, and by the dim light of a street-lantern perceived a young man with a stout rattan in his hand, who had been his brave deliverer.

“Are you hurt, sir?” eagerly inquired the stranger.

“Not much ; you have saved my money—my life, I mean ;—I saw the glittering knife at my throat. Who are you ?”

“My name is Maxwell ; I am an American.”

“A Yankee ! Well, you are a brave one ; come to my office to-morrow (here is my card), and I will talk over this matter with you.”

“I will see you safely home, sir.”

“Thank you ; there is no need of it ; the cowards will not molest me again. I am near my lodgings.”

Those mean lodgings Mr. Gracy did not like to expose to a stranger.

William Maxwell called the next day, as requested, at the office of Mr. Gracy. Much surprised was the latter to learn who had thus been brought to his notice.

After the strictest injunction to secrecy, he told William his whole history.

Not long after this event William was seized with the illness which he mentioned in his letter to Bertha. This illness was severe and protracted. The expenses incident upon it exhausted his funds, and Mr. Gracy offered to *lend* him money; that was *his* kindness. He would not willingly have abstracted a dollar from what he believed belonged to his wife. So rigid was he in his economy, that a Chinaman living on rats and mice, and a handful of rice a day, could scarcely have exceeded him.

From William Mr. Gracy received the most glowing account which partial friendship could give of his son Hamilton. When he saw the letter Patsy wrote for Bertha to William, the first tears which had moistened his eyes for many years fell on the paper as he exclaimed: "My own *little* Patsy! How beautifully the child writes!" Indeed, he seemed quite to have forgotten that Time, in its rapid flight, had brought Patsy to the verge of womanhood.

He now resolved to return to his family as soon as he could settle up his business advantageously. About this time he made his will, had it legally attested, and a copy of it placed

in the hands of the American consul, who, together with William, were the witnesses. By this will Mr. Gracy gave the whole of the large fortune which he had accumulated through years of toil and deprivation, to his wife. His ample funds had from time to time been safely invested in New York.

‘Man appoints, and God disappoints.’ Mr. Gracy had named the very day for leaving Canton, and had taken passage in a ship for New York; but it was not so to be. He was suddenly attacked by a disease which from the first threatened to be fatal. He sent for William Maxwell and entrusted to him an ivory casket containing the will, a number of business certificates, and two small parcels; a doll and a few Chinese toys were in one, for “little Patsy;” in the other, for his son Hamilton, were a valuable watch and a miniature of Margaret Hamilton before she became Mrs. Gracy, which her husband had kept through seasons of extreme want, as mementoes of other days. To Mrs. Gracy he wrote a few lines with a feeble, trembling hand, as follows:

“MY DEAR, MY LONG-NEGLECTED WIFE:

“I am on the very verge of the unknown world (God have mercy on my soul!) Can you forgive all the wrong I have done you? The fortune which I now restore to you I feel to be a miserable compensation for the long years of labor and trial to which my extravagance and desertion have subjected you. I implore your forgiveness with my dying breath.

“From young Maxwell I learn that Hamilton is like his good mother, and an honor to her; and that Patsy is a cheerful, industrious little girl. God bless them! Do not let them despise the memory of their erring father.

“I owe much to Maxwell—life itself, and more than life. His Christian example has been a light to my path, and his Christian prayers will ascend when I pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death.

“He owes me nothing. Be very kind to him for the sake of your penitent husband, who now bids you and his dear children farewell. God grant it may not be eternal!

“JAMES GRACY.”

The day after Mr. Gracy had written this letter, he handed a purse to William Maxwell, saying, "Take this and use it for your return to your own country. My passage is now taken for another world. I too am going home."

After this, Mr. Gracy's mind wandered, and the next morning, while William was reading by his bed-side the prayer for the dying, his spirit passed to the world of retribution.

Mr. Gracy, with the habitual carefulness he had of late practiced with regard to pecuniary matters, had only reserved from his funds enough for his expenses till he reached home. When William had paid the physician's bill, and other bills incurred by sickness and death, the remainder was barely sufficient for passage-money. Poor William had only a small sum of his own in addition. Yet all he asked of his employers in Canton was a letter of introduction to the house of Horner, Minturn & Co.

Nobly did he perform the sacred duty entrusted to him. On the long passage, instead of repining at the misfortunes which had befallen him, he gratefully dwelt on the opportunities for doing good which had been presented

to him, and was thankful to be relieved from pecuniary obligations to Mr. Gracy. He regained his health during the voyage, and made himself useful to his fellow passengers and the rough sailors, among whom he was a special favorite. This latter information, however, he did not vouchsafe to his auditors, Miss Nancy and Bertha, but he told them the substance of what has just been related.

Miss Nancy, when he had finished the mournful account of his shipwreck and subsequent journey, called Bertha out of the parlor, and leading the way to her own bed-room, which Bertha had never before been permitted to enter, she locked the door, and then opening an old-fashioned chest, she took out a huge red morocco pocket-book.

"Bertha, darling, take your brother's money to him," said she, handing out a fifty dollar note.

"My brother's money!"

"Yes, to be sure; you know we have not spent all his money, only half of it; hand this to him and tell him it is his own."

Bertha was delighted to be the bearer of such a communication, and flew down stairs.

“There now, Bill, what a nice thing it was to put your money in Miss Nancy’s bank—here it is. I owe you fifty more, which I mean to pay one of these days.”

It was some time before William could be induced to take the whole;—a part of it, he said, he should need—but he had in his wallet a letter of introduction to Horner, Minturn & Co., which he thought would secure to him a place in their counting-house.

“But you must make yourself presentable, Bill. You don’t know what an expert seamstress I have become. I will go to the village and buy lots of things to make up for you, and Miss Nancy will cut them out. Isn’t she the queerest, dearest old maid that ever was known? Besides, you are sick and forlorn, and Miss Nancy says you must recruit.”

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

GRATITUDE.

It was some days before Mrs. Gracy communicated the startling intelligence which she had received to her son Hamilton. After the melancholy story had been briefly told, she concluded her letter as follows :

* * * * *

“And now, my dear son, relax not your efforts. The riches which have once taken wings may find them again. By their removal you have been urged by a sufficient motive to strenuous exertion, and God only knows from how much temptation you have thus been delivered.

“An immense weight of responsibility now devolves on us ;—we are to be the almoners of God’s bounty. We are to seek out the means for doing good most judiciously and effectively.

“Patsy and I have been much surprised and pleased with Bertha Maxwell’s late conduct. Thinking that Patsy would not be able to go on with her school as usual, she came and eagerly begged to take her place. Patsy allowed her to do so, knowing she was well qualified to teach. When the week ended, Patsy told Bertha she should be able to resume her duties on Monday morning. Bertha colored hesitated, and at length in a very humble manner entreated as the greatest possible favor, that Patsy would give up the school entirely, and allow her to take it.

“After consulting me, Patsy granted this most unexpected request. William Maxwell’s health was so much impaired that Miss Nancy will not yet allow him to leave her house.

“Hasten to us, my son, for there are business matters which require your attention, and we long for your sympathy.

“Most devotedly, YOUR MOTHER.”

A part of Hamilton Gracy’s reply was as follows:

* * “The matter about which I consulted you in a former letter, my dear mother, has been decided. I confessed to Mr. Perrit my attachment to his daughter Esther, and honestly stated to him that I had no expectations excepting what must arise from my own exertions in my profession. I therefore did not think it right to make a proposal, or even allow Esther to discover how deeply and entirely I was devoted to her. Moreover, I had no reason to be certain that this affection was reciprocated. Mr. Perrit pleasantly replied that I must learn that from herself, and heartily wished me success. Emboldened by his generous approval, I revealed to my gentle Esther the hopes and fears which had long agitated me, and thank God, she consented to unite herself for weal or for woe with your portionless son;—rich only in love and hope. Rejoice with me, dear mother, that this avowal was made before the reception of the astonishing news.

“And my friend, my noble friend, William Maxwell, what can we do for him? Such services as his can never be repaid. More than ever may we now call ourselves Damon and

Pythias, excepting that the debt of gratitude is all on my side. He is the chosen brother of my soul, and I cannot be entirely happy till I have walked arm-in-arm by the brook-side, and confided to him, as I did in boyhood, all that is in my heart.

“I hope to be with you in the course of the week ;—imperative duty detains me at present.

“I sincerely rejoice with you in Bertha’s improvement. I have no doubt her countenance is now more truly ‘angelic’ than it was when I raved about it in days of youthful folly. Give my kindest regards to her and to good Miss Nancy. Your grateful and loving son,

“HAMILTON GRACY.”

In a few days Hamilton was with his mother and sister, entering earnestly into all their joys and sorrows. But his more immediate personal interests did not prevent him from feeling the deepest sympathy with his friend, William Maxwell, who was yet unable to leave for New York.

The first walk that the invalid took was with Hamilton to the grotto and the brook. There

they talked long of other days and of the changes which had since taken place.

Without a particle of envious feeling did William listen to the fair prospects which his friend Hamilton opened up like a long glorious vista into the future, although a dark curtain seemed to veil his own prospects, and almost shut out every ray of hope.

“Cheer up, William,” said Gracy, “you are still the same man. With health, energy and courage will return. A man is wrecked indeed who loses his character—his reputation. True, you have to begin anew, but your experience of life, its hardships and its vicissitudes, is a lesson of inestimable value, which, although it has cost you dear, has tried your very soul and found it true metal—pure gold.”

“You are too partial, Hamilton. I am every way vastly your inferior.”

“Come, now, we will not make comparisons, nor compliments, either, unless the fairies, Violetta and Rosamia, should suddenly start out of the ruinous grotto. Those days of romance and poetry were delightful.”

“Like a glorious morning in June which

heralds a coming thunder storm," replied William, mournfully.

"Which storm ends in a brilliant sunset and a splendid bow of promise," replied his friend, cheeringly.

* * * * *

Miss Bertha Maxwell's first experience of school teaching was not without its trials. What useful occupation ever is? Idleness surely has greater trials. It was, however, an excellent discipline, exactly what Bertha needed.

Although several years older than the other pupils, she had been their school-fellow, and when she took the arm-chair and assumed the dignity becoming that elevated situation, they were disposed to view it in a ludicrous light; smiles and suppressed sneers greeted her from several rosy lips, and winks and nods that portended mischief.

The first day she was so much discouraged and annoyed, that she was ready to give up, and several times turned to the black-board and wrote or drew diagrams, to conceal tears of vexation. But she persevered from day to day and week to week, and at the end of the first quar-

ter the peculiar difficulties in her path were vanquished. Ordinary trials she had the courage thenceforth bravely to encounter, because she had gained the respect and love of her pupils.

“Miss Nancy, I am so happy,” said she; “I never was so happy in all my life. I am going to pay off my debts. You needn’t look so doubtful, dear, I am. Not to you, because you pay yourself all the way with the pleasure of doing good; and so would brother William if he did not need something more material. I am going to send him the fifty dollars. I wish it could be doubled and doubled again: and it shall be if my life and health are spared. You know he will want to begin business himself one of these days, instead of being a mere clerk, and I must help him along. I never was so delighted with any money as I am with this that I have earned for myself. I cannot help laughing when I remember my silly contempt for the vulgar people, as I considered them, who had to work. To be sure, mine is head work, thanks to you, dear little busy bee, who saved

me from the labor for which I had not sufficient strength."

"To go farther back; you are indebted to Esther Perrit and Louisa for being here at all."

"How is that?"

"If you had not remembered how happy they appeared to be with me, you would not have come to the old maid in the log-house. If Esther had not exerted a blessed influence over me while here, I should not have been willing to receive and retain you when you did come."

"Especially with a carpet-bag! Often have I laughed with Louisa over your fearful alarm at the sight of their carpet-bag on their first arrival."

"Ah, that visit was one of the greatest blessings Providence ever granted to me. Without it I might to this day have been living in gloomy solitude!"

"Instead of having been tormented by the freaks and follies of a silly, wayward girl, who, after all your trouble and care, has nothing to return for it but grateful love."

Miss Nancy left the room with her eyes swimming in tears, and soon returned. "Here, Ber-

tha, is your dear little watch. I sent for it long ago, but I solemnly promised Mrs. Gracy I would not give it to you till your gratitude to me was deep and sincere."

Bertha's eyes sparkled with delight for a moment; then a deep shade of sadness flitted over her face. Painful associations were summoned up by that watch.

After a few minutes' silence, she threw her arms around Miss Nancy's neck, and sobbing like a child, cried, "Oh, Miss Nancy, I would rather be Bertha the loved than Bertha the beautiful!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

“NOT EXPECTED TO HAPPEN.”

LETTER FROM LOUISA PERRIT TO BERTHA MAXWELL.

“*December 29, 18—.*

“MY DEAR BERTHA :

“Pack up your trunks, aunty and you, and come to us immediately. We want you for the Christmas holidays. Mrs. Gracy and Patsy are already with us. I have a grand secret to tell, and I am permitted to have the pleasure of telling it, because—why? *That* I will not tell.

“You know Hamilton has been engaged more than two years, and is now established in his profession. Well, ‘the consummation devoutly to be wished’ (trite quotation, that!), is appointed for New Year’s Day. You know, moreover, that Mr. William Maxwell is now the junior partner in the house of Horner, Minturn & Co.

"All these things you know, but you don't know that we are to have a double wedding! There now, exercise your Yankee faculties, and *guess* who are the parties.

"William Maxwell and Louisa Perrit.

"No ; guess again.

"Who are to be bridesmaids ?

"Miss Nancy Perrit, Miss Bertha Maxwell, and Miss Louisa Perrit.

"Bride and bridegroom, Mr. Maxwell and Miss Gracy.

"There, you have it. William wished to tell you himself, but I begged it as a special favor.

"Marriages *do* take place in real life, as in romances, as the winding up of youthful history ; but, in real life, not exactly as they are *expected to happen*.

"Papa and mamma so urgently insisted Damon and Pythias should have but one wedding, that there was no refusing them.

"Tell good old Orpy this wedding would be incomplete without a bride's-loaf of her famous fruit cake ; her favorite, Esther, says so.

"The brides give dresses, gloves, &c. to us, so you need make no preparations of that kind.

“Write at what *hour* we may expect you, and papa will meet you in the carriage at the station.

“In the hurly-burly of the approaching nuptials, I, bridesmaid to be, write in a flutter and in haste. Patsy and Esther, brides to be, are as solemn and sedate as daguerreotypes.

“Yours truly,

“LOUISA PERRIT.”

When Bertha had finished reading this letter aloud, she exclaimed, “This is astonishing news! I always thought William would marry Louisa Perrit; but Patsy will make him a better wife than anybody else in the whole world. Will you go to the wedding, Miss Nancy? *Will* you go?”

“Yes, I will; but not to be bridesmaid; that would render the whole ceremony ridiculous. I will set Orpy immediately about making the cake. You, Bertha, dismiss school for a fortnight, and write to Louisa that we shall leave home in the morning train, day after to-morrow.”

It was a brilliant, and yet a sensible wedding, for the guests were all near and dear friends.

The solemn ceremony was performed by the Rev. Mr. Nelton, of Sylvania, and felt in a suitable manner by the young persons who were taking those momentous vows, which nothing but religious principles, aided by the grace of God, would enable them faithfully to fulfil.











